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Mrs. Charles Mack (Cynthia)

Cynthia Mack

(25)

Final Transcript Mrs. Charles Mack (Cynthia)

PORTRAITS OF THE PAST: THE JEWS OF PORTLAND

The Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Program

Dr. Konnilyn G. Feig, Director

September 1, 1977

Commissioned by: The Jewish Federation of Southern Maine

The Maine Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Program

PORTRAITS OF THE PAST: THE JEWS OF PORTLAND

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Commissioned by:

The Jewish Federation of Southern Maine with the support of the University of Maine, Portland/Gorham, College of Arts and Sciences

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Project Dates:

June 1, 1976 to September 15, 1977

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18. Mrs. Arnold Goodman (Dorothy)
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21. Harry Judelshon
22. Mrs. Max Kaplan (Ethel)
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24. Mrs. Meyer Lerman (Ethel)
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27. Mrs. Harold Nelson (Mildred)

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29. Mrs. Rebecca Rice

30. Maurice Rubinoff

31. Louis Seavey

32. Barnett Shur

33. Mrs. Barnett Shur (Clarice)

34. Bertram Silverman

35. Israel Silverman (Dean)

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38. Mrs. Ben Troen (Gertrude)

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41. Judge Sidney Wernick

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43. Mrs. Lester Willis (Rita)

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* Deceased since interview

August, 1977

The Oral History Study

A Note to the Reader from the Director:

Background to the Study

Sometime in the early summer of 1975, a group of Jewish leaders appointed by the Jewish Federation of Southern Maine as a "Jewish Bicentennial Committee" met together at the home of Rabbi Sky. National and State Bicentennial planning was at its peak; and some Jews wanted the Jewish community to do something to emphasize the heritage, the presence, the tradition, or the contributions in Maine over the 200 years of a distinctive culture and religious community. They knew from heresay that the Jews had come early to Maine, formed significant communities and had made and were making a considerable impact on the past, present and future of the State. But what should they do? The American Bicentennial theme, "Heritage and Horizons," seemed to echo the Talmudic words: "Know whence you have come and wither you are going." So many possibilities existed, and the suggestions flowed freely. Should the plans be comprehensive and cover the entire State or should they emphasize only the larger communities? Should the program, whatever it became, be aimed at increasing the historical and cultural understanding of the general community, or should it be a kind of re-exploration, re-examination, reminder for the diverse Jewish community? Ought it take the form of some gift which a grateful Jewish community could present to the State which had so recently served as a haven or opportunity for all of their immigrant parents and grandparents? And what vehicles should it use - theatre, music, lectures, exhibits, discussion groups, dialogues? Whatever was done would have to be inexpensive, because the Federation Program Funds were already committed to a continuing project which by consensus the entire community agreed had an urgent priority - the resettlement in Portland of Russian Jewish families, fleeing from the

modern form of Soviet persecution. The Federation had always participated fully in national and international projects, and the Refugee Program received its usual alert and committed attention. So the Committee deliberated, argued, pondered, debated.

Finally, a member of the group hesitatingly suggested the sponsorship of a book - which would detail the entire history of the Jews of Maine. No information was available on the Jews of Maine with the single exception of a brief book, Portland Jewry, written by Ben Band in 1955, sponsored by a newly formed Jewish Historical Society, and published locally. Meant to be a beginning step in helping the Jewish community learn about itself, the book essentially tried to pull together the chronology of events in the formation of the Portland community and its institutions, and to identify some of the participants and leaders in that extraordinary development. The beginning step was a valiant one, but it ended there as did the Historical Society. The Portland Jews were too busy doing, building, creating, and helping Jews across the world. It was not yet the time for reflection, for stocktaking, for a thorough examination of the ROOTS of the community. But now, perhaps the time and energy had to be taken, lest the history disappear, never to be reclaimed; and the rich tradition never be transmitted accurately to the children and to the community.

Rabbi Sky mentioned that the American Jewish Committee was suggesting, in fact, encouraging, a series of Oral History Projects across the country, emphasizing that a well conceived multifaceted reconstruction of the past could surely help to create a balance, an awareness of the unfolding story of the American Jewish experience. Perhaps that thrust should be seized upon in Portland. But no one really knew what oral history meant, and additionally, who would do it? There were no Jewish historians in the State of Maine. Rabbi Sky alerted the Committee to the unusual fact that the Dean of Arts and Sciences

at the University of Maine at Portland-Gorham was a scholar of the Holocaust; and as an Associate Professor of History had initiated courses in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Perhaps Dr. Konnilyn Feig could be approached. Rabbi Sky knew that Dean Feig had a heavy schedule in her position; that she would never allow her additional commitment to the teaching of the Holocaust to be tampered with; and that in whatever free time she managed to find, she was writing her own book on Hitler's concentration camps - the capstone of fifteen years of research in Europe. It looked hopeless, but the Committee asked the Rabbi to try. And he persevered. And Dean Feig found herself volunteering her free time to create and direct the project.

When I entered the picture, I had the same overwhelming reservations which the Committee had already expressed. I had little time, and my interest and commitment centered on the Holocaust. Where would I ever find the space for such an enormous project, and who would help? We had no graduate program in Liberal Arts at the University. Where would I get the trained assistance I would need? I met with the Committee, outlined the limits of what could be done, and explained that the project could never be a book, but a re-beginning, another first step, which could be built upon in the succeeding years, and resulting perhaps, someday in a full and real history of Maine Jewry.

It would be an oral history folklore of Portland Jewry; but widened to use the group as a microcosm of Maine Jewry, an example of some kinds of experiences of American Jewry, a renewed acquaintance with the Old World Culture, and a picture of the often-repeated American immigrant story. It would result in a set of final transcripts, made available to the entire reading public. Thus, a small study, a beginning, with wide implications, centering in Portland but suggesting a state-wide impact, a re-examination for the Jewish community and a first reading understanding for the general community, a part of a picture

puzzle for an entire nation, a gift - to the Jewish community and to the Portland community. To my surprise, the Committee and the Federation voted to sponsor the project. I finally agreed to do it for two reasons. When I came to Portland, the Jewish community had been very good to me and had invited me to the Synagogues, the organizations and the homes to talk about the Holocaust. I felt some gratitude. But far more important, I felt a sense of shock when I, too, discovered the absence of any real research and history on one of Maine's most significant immigrant groups. I, too, felt the sense of urgency to re-begin before it really was too late.

Oral History as a Research Discipline

Oral History concerns itself with conservation of a special kind. It conserves the intimate knowledge and experience of humans who have made significant contributions to the life of the time, to a group, to an area, or who have been ideally posted to observe the major events and developments. These humans may be leaders and movers of history, such as Kennedy, Kruschev, and other notables. But oral history taken from those who "made history," only touches the tip of the iceberg when understanding of human cultures and the fabric of civilization is at issue. Perhaps, then, of even greater significance are oral histories taken from groups of ordinary human beings - men and women, known primarily to their neighbors, and perhaps in their towns and states, through whose lives have flowed the currents of an historical age; and whose reactions and understandings determine a collective impact upon a cultural grouping and a time; or upon whom a collective impact of a time and a culture can be measured, evaluated, analyzed, pondered.

The ways of life characteristic of earlier America are rapidly disappearing, but there are persons still alive today who remember them

vividly. Their memories will not be preserved by writing historical memoirs. Oral history projects have attempted to utilize individual recordings, which are admittedly fragmentary and highly personal, but when taken together provide a fund of color, detail, and incidents valuable for future historical research. Roots, centers, beginnings, road signs - all are critical ingredients to any portion of America's colorful culture, and to the essentials of every human being's possession of knowledge of his own individual and group past. And here it is that the necessity for an oral history project centering upon Jewish life in Maine reaches the critical level.

The Jews in Maine

That Jews have been deeply involved in the religious, educational, political, cultural, intellectual and economic life of the State of Maine is one of the best-kept secrets in historical and sociological literature. And Maine is one of the few states in America to be devoid of any major study of one of its important cultural influences. Since 1800 at least, Jews have been living in Maine, and since 1829 with the formation of a Jewish Community in Bangor, some Jewish community life has existed. By 1866, Jews had begun to settle in Portland in noticeable numbers. For nearly 100 years, then, Jews have been making a considerable contribution to and impact upon the state at every level and in every area.

The Jerusalem of the North - the term used so frequently in the past to refer to the Portland Jewish Community. Almost all of the Jews who immigrated to Portland came from Eastern Europe - from Poland, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania - and they brought with them the rich Ashkenazen Orthodox religious and cultural traditions. Orthodoxy found a new home in Portland, in a transplanted form, and held its strength and oneness far longer than most communities in the U.S.

Early twentieth century Portland might be described for the Jews as a community of eastern European shtetl survivors, a pious Orthodox community with several synagogues, central in the lives of the community members. Formal education played a minimal role in the lives of their parents, yet most of the children are learned in the study of the Talmud and graduated from college or comparable institutions. Here we have an unusual phenomena: parents are immigrants, starting out as peddlers or small shopkeepers, and in one generation, the children are college graduates. These college-educated men and women began in the Twenties and Thirties to question traditions which seemed to them troublesome in a modern world. In America, the land of freedom, of relief from pogroms and Russian Army conscription, where the streets were "paved with gold," the wall of Orthodox piety of Portland's Jews began to show cracks as these men and women struggled to educate and provide a better standard of living for themselves. Many had to break the holiness of the Sabbath to work.

Institutions had to be created. In the decade from 1920 to 1930 the Jewish Home for the Aged was built to accommodate family members who could no longer be cared for by their families. In the decade from 1930 to 1940 the idea of a new Jewish Community Center, with a gym, social rooms, kosher kitchens, and sauna and bathing facilities, culminated in the dedication of the present Center in 1938. Throughout the Forties and the Fifties this Center was the focus of family, social and athletic life and the focus of all Jewish functions in the city of Portland.

The winds of Conservativism and Reformism bypassed Portland and it was not until the decade from 1940 to 1950 that a demographic migration from the inner city to the outskirts of Portland, and a shared belief by many that options to Orthodoxy had to be created, resulted in the formation of Temple Beth El, as a Conservative Congregation. The Conservative movement wanted to conserve

that which was appealing in Orthodoxy, and to bring those who were no longer practicing Judaism back into a religious atmosphere. That decade also saw the organization of the Jewish Federation, and its international concern in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the birth of Israel. The funds raised to help Israel during those eventful years into the Fifties are impressive for a community which has relatively little Jewish wealth.

Jewish people succeeded during the next two decades in breaking down some of the barriers to those of their faith in clubs, organizations, professions, institutions, and geographic areas which had previously excluded them. The need for the construction of a new Orthodox Synagogue in the Temple Beth El area became clear during the early Fifties; and the Orthodox Shaarey Tphiloh Hebrew School and Synagogue on Noyes Street was erected. The Newbury Street Synagogue, Etz Chaim, and Anshe Sfaard maintained their separate identities, although many of the congregation members of Newbury Street became members of the new Synagogue. During the Sixties the Community Hebrew School was created.

Today Orthodoxy and Conservativism exist today side by side, strong, active enriched by each other. In the baggage which the immigrants, the founders of the Portland community and those who followed brought with them were two unflinching commitments and enduring dreams - education and public service, unfaltering, regardless of the cost. And the story which emerges is one of involvement and the mutually beneficial changes which come out of the tensions and reciprocal relationships between Maine society and Maine's Jews as individuals and as a community.

The Study

This transcript is only one of forty-four. It presents a portrait of a family, a story of generations, in America and in Europe. The reader would be doing himself a disservice to focus only on this transcript . All forty-four

volumes should be read, because they tell a different story - the story of a remarkable community, a courageous people. Each volume is a family story and one small part of a community folklore history. The full set of final transcripts will be readily available to the Jewish community in the Temple Beth El Library and to the public, in the Portland Public Library. In addition, a professional Permanent Photographic Exhibition containing mounted pictures of each interviewee and pictures of all of the buildings and places significant in Portland Jewish History has been presented to the Federation. It will reside in Temple Beth El.

The enormous project itself was completed under the Coordinator, Lisa Wilhelm, with two years of committed, continuous and volunteer help from a few undergraduate students trained by the Director and the Coordinator, and a few gentile and Jewish community volunteers who worked with incredible energy and dedication. Behind it was the unfailing sponsorship of the Jewish Federation. And, of course, central to it all are the human beings who are the study, the men and women who invited us into their lives and homes, and who so openly and compassionately shared their thoughts, their honest assessments, their feelings and intuitions, their remembrance of factual events, their hopes and their fears concerning the development of this exceptionally strong and traditionally Orthodox Jewish community over a period of seventy-five years, and its development in the future.

Contained within their words is an intricate web of Jewish concerns which bear significance not only to the present and future generations of this community, but also to the broader realm of American Jewry. The project raised as many questions as it answered, questions of considerable scope which could affect American Judaism in the future: What does being

Jewish mean to you? Of what significance is Israel to you in your life? How do you feel about intermarriage and assimilation, and how will these facts affect Judaism? What trends have you observed in the Jewish institutions in this city, and where are these trends leading you? What have been the changes in your Jewish family life - which traditions, cultural and religious, remain with you and which have been discarded?

The majority of interviewees are over the age of fifty, born of immigrant parents or immigrants themselves, who carried with them to Portland the traditions of the Eastern European shtetl and who have watched that ghettoized secure life in the "Jerusalem of the North" be slowly supplanted by a more modern, urbane existence of the present-day Jews.

They represent a heterogeneous group but with a strong linkage. Each is an inspiration, and each reflects commitment, dedication, humaness. As individuals, each has something to say about himself, his life, his hopes, his dreams, his thoughts, his sadnesses. And if the group is placed together, the picture that this gathering together paints, patch-work quilted as it may be, kaleidoscopic as it may seem, has an artistic potential for richness, continuity, color, form and spirit.

Those of the older generation miss the piety of the "Jerusalem of the North": the days when on a Friday afternoon the smells of the Sabbath baking emanated from Jewish neighborhoods; when the men gathered after the daily minyan within the confines of their synagogues to share their thoughts, discuss business, or play cards; when Bar Mitzvah celebrations were simple, with a little herring and kichel, and pure; and when the younger generation shared their lives with the older generation. Today the traditional, Orthodox ways are melded with a modern age, and Jews realize that they can be both good Americans <u>and</u> good Jews. The Jewish Family Services has successfully

brought about, during the past three decades, a transition from the old belief that Jews should take care of their own to an enlightened view that Jews should take advantage of community services. Citizens are now aware of Jewish contributions to the general community, and the "Jewish tokenism" of past decades is disappearing. While there are as many definitions of Judaism as there are Jews, ranging from ultra-Orthodox to minimal identification with any aspect of Judaism, there is little to support the belief of one of our interviewees that the American Jew "will sink into the fading sunset." Many view Judaism, to some degree, as a continuum which has survived for centuries. Many also talk about it as a cultural identification, a combination of religion and common ancestry in terms of the Bible and mystical in the sense that it is inexplicable. Judaism is more than good works and ethics. It includes that mystical, spiritual something which ties all Jews from all times together in their diversity - that mystical tie which all of our interviewees struggled to define when speaking of their own Judaism.

To everyone the state of Israel has some degree of significance. "A Homeland." "A fountainhead with which all Jews can identify." "A place that worries about Jews - just in case." "A unifying structure of Judaism." "The yearning of a 2,000-year-old culture." "It shows the world that Judaism lives." "Israel made the Jew an important human being in today's world." "A paradise built from a wasteland." These are just a few of many reasons why Israel must survive for the Portland Jews.

It is with a depth of gratitude that I express my final thanks to these forty-four individuals who have allowed all of us from the outside to view for the first time a picture of the Jerusalem of the North, to understand

the background and traditions of this community, and to realize the commitment and contribution, past and present, of Portland Jewry.

Dr. Konnilyn G. Feig
August 25, 1977

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE:	Mrs. Charles Mack (Cynthia)
INTERVIEWER:	Dr. Konnilyn Feig
PROJECT ASSISTANTS:	Lisa Wilhelm Cheryl Greaney Martha Browne
PLACE:	Dean Feig's Office University of Maine
DATE:	September 23, 1976
TIME:	11:30 A.M.

MRS. CHARLES MACK (CYNTHIA)

Cynthia Jane Mack was born in Portland in 1934 of immigrant parents. Her mother, born in Lithuania in 1904, grew up in Vilna, the daughter of a rabbi. She was the next to the youngest of 13 children. In 1905, the mother lost three brothers and a sister in a pogrom. A few years later both of her parents died; and with four sisters and two brothers she fled illegally to Paris where they lived for five years. When Cynthia's mother was 15, she and six other Gellers arrived in America. Some of them came to Portland; others went to Boston.

Cynthia's father was born in Minsk, Russia as Israel Kaatz. At age 17 he came to America with a brother in 1915. He left his 12 brothers and sisters behind in Russia. During his first years here, Mr. Kaatz worked in the Bath shipyard and then in 1921 started in real estate in Portland. He became a building contractor and when he had finished, he had built between 500 and 600 homes in the Portland area. In 1960, he traveled to Russia to visit a sister whom he had not seen for 40 years. He died in 1962 at the age of 62. His wife died at age 62 in 1967.

Cynthia Mack spoke only Yiddish until the first grade. She went on to graduate from high school, attended Mount Ida Junior College for two years and then Emerson College where she received a B.A. in Journalism in 1955. She spent the next few years working in Boston and came back to Portland in 1960. In 1962, Cynthia Kaatz married Charles Mack, a native of Portland, but the son of a Russian immigrant, Samuel Mack. He is an advertising agent for Geiger Brothers. They have one daughter, Rachel.

Mrs. Mack has been extremely active in the Jewish community and has belonged to most of the Jewish groups in Portland. Between 1962 and 1967, she served on the Board of Directors of the United Way, the Maine Humane Society, the American

Red Cross, and the Volunteers in Public Service.

She was Vice President of Hadassah, Vice President of Center Women's Club, Vice President of the Jewish Community Center Board of Directors, President of Temple Beth El Sisterhood, a member of the Hebrew Scholarship Committee, and a steady participant in the Federation Fund drives. She has also served recently as Director of the Center Day Camp. At the moment, Mrs. Mack is on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Home for the Aged and Temple Beth El. She is a member of the Religious Affairs Committee of Temple Beth El and Vaad Hakashruth. She is also the permanent consultant for the Jewish Oral History Project. She has been a Zionist since 1947. The National Women's League in 1972 presented Mrs. Mack with the Woman of Valor Award. She lost all her European relatives in the Holocaust.

She and her family reside at 16 Longwood Drive.

August, 1977

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL PROJECT

Portland, Maine

1976

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee Name Mrs. Charles Mack (Cynthia)

I certify that I have transcribed the Interview Tapes to the best of my ability, as accurately and clearly as possible. I have discussed the contents of the tapes and transcripts with no one.

Transcriber:

Name Elaine Lewis

Signature Elaine Lewis

Date 11/12/76

Ok'd by: K. Feig

Project Director

Jewish Bicentennial Project
Dr. Konnilyn Feig, Director
1976

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL PROJECT

Portland, Maine

1976

EDITED TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee Name Cynthia Mack

I certify that I have edited the Original Transcript to the best of my ability, checking carefully on all unclear sounds and omissions from the tape. I have added no material of substance and changed no ideas. The editing goals were completion, clarity, removal of redundancy, removal of unnecessary comments and "chatter" non central to the interview, and grammatical clarification. The prime goal was a transcript which read well, flowed, and presented the ideas clearly, while always retaining the mechanisms and responses which kept intact the personality, state of mind, and beliefs of the interviewee.

Editor:

Name and Title Dr. Konnilyn Feig

Signature Konnilyn Feig

Date 12/18/76

Reread and Rechecked and held Confidential by

Name Lisa Wilhelm (signature)

Date 12/11/76

Name _____ (signature)

Date _____

Typist:

I certify that I have typed this transcript accurately and held the contents confidential.

Name Geraldine Kendrick (signature)

Date Jan. 7, 1977

Jewish Bicentennial Project
Dr. Konnilyn Feig, Director
1976

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Charles Mack (Cynthia)

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Konnilyn Feig

DATE: September 23, 1976

F: This is an interview with Mrs. Charles Mack (Cynthia) for the Jewish Federation and the University of Maine, College of Arts and Sciences, Portland, the Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Project by Dr. Konnilyn Feig and her assistants, Lisa Wilhelm, Cheryl Greaney, and Marty Browne, at the Dean of Arts and Sciences office at the University of Maine on Falmouth Street, Portland, Maine, on September 23, 1976, at 11:30 A.M.

F: All right. You were born in Portland. What year?

M: 1934.

F: Where were your parents born?

M: My mother was born in Lithuania.

F: Do you know where?

M: No.

F: Right, left, bottom, top, what area?

M: She moved at a very young age to Vilna. Six or seven months old.

F: And she grew up in Vilna?

M: Yes.

F: In the citadel of Jewish culture.

M: Of course.

F: All right. Where was your father born?

M: In Minsk, Russia.

F: They met after they came to America?

M: Yes.

F: Okay, let's take your mother first, then. Did she ever talk about your grandparents?

M: Yes.

F: They remained in the old country?

M: They died at a very early age. They were deceased when she left.

F: What age did she come to America? What age did she leave Lithuania?

M: She went to Vilna at seven months old and she lived in Paris for five years. Kept on missing the boat to America.

F: How old was she when she got here?

M: Fifteen.

F: Fifteen!

M: Yes.

F: Well, what did her parents do before they were deceased?

M: Her father was a rabbi.

F: Your grandfather was a rabbi?

M: Yes. A red-headed, red-bearded rabbi.

F: Was your mother learned?

M: Yes.

F: So, they went from Lithuania to Vilna in order that her father could be a rabbi in one of the Synagogues there?

M: Yes.

F: I understand some of the structure of Vilna at that time. Do you know in what kind of a congregation he was a rabbi? [M: no.] Do you know anything about his days as a rabbi in Vilna?

M: No, absolutely nothing.

F: Why?

M: Well, he died when he was 41; and he was sick for many years before that. He had diabetes.

F: Your grandfather had diabetes and died at 41. Now, was your mother the only child?

M: She was one of thirteen children.

F: All these thirteen were alive at the time?

M: Yes.

F: Wait a minute. [Pause] Thirteen children. She was the youngest?

M: No, she was the next to youngest. Eight brothers.

F: So, thirteen children, and in some year, like about eighteen something or other, give me an idea about the time your grandfather died. Wait a minute, in what year was your mother born? [Pause] About?

M: She was 62 when she died, which was six years ago. [Figuring] 1904. It's very hard to tell because the passports were not . . .

F: Okay, she was born about 1904?

M: Probably.

F: And how old do you think she was when your father died, [pause] I mean when your grandfather died?

M: Very, very young. I don't know the age. Probably five or six years old.

F: That young! [M: uhhuh] Okay, so about 1909, he died. How long after that was it before your grandmother died?

M: A short time, a very short time.

F: So, your mother finds herself, as a very young child, in Vilna without any parents [M: uhhuh], but with thirteen brothers and sisters. [M: uhhuh] And they take care of her?

M: Yes. One of her older sisters had married and was living on a farm and taking care of the younger siblings.

F: Were they well off or [M: no] were they dirt poor?

M: Yes.

F: Really poor?

M: Yes.

F: Could she remember, could she tell you about it?

M: All she recalled about her home there was that the floors were made of dirt and the animals slept inside with them because there was no heat in the house.

F: Then, somehow, she went to Paris. How come she went to Paris?

M: They had relatives there. In 1904 or 1905, there was a pogrom in Vilna and she lost three brothers and a sister.

F: Was she ever told how?

M: Yes.

F: Could you tell us about that?

M: It usually happened about tax time when there were great celebrations in the town, and the tax collectors and their gang used to go out and get drunk. One night a couple of her brothers happened to wander into town and they were attacked and killed [pause], just walking through town. They were very young, fourteen or fifteen years old, and one of them was brought back sliced up in several different packages. She recalls that very vividly.

F: She remembered that?

M: Yes, she did.

F: So, she lost at least two of her brothers or sisters through a pogrom?

M: Uhhuh.

F: How many of them left, then, to go to Paris?

M: She went with four of her sisters and two of her brothers. The others remained behind.

F: Went to Paris?

M: Went to Paris.

F: How did they get out? Did they have any trouble getting out of Lithuania?

M: Yes, they did. They went at night, and they went by paying off several members of the council, probably; crossed each border at night, illegally.

F: Without passports?

M: Without passports.

F: And somehow got to Paris?

M: And somehow got to Paris.

F: Seven of them. [M: uhhuh] What was her last name?

M: Geller.

F: So, there were seven Gellers in Paris? [M: uhhuh] These other six were older than she was [M: yes]; they took her there when she was about six? [M: uhhuh] And she lived in Paris for five years [M: yes], until maybe she was about ten.

M: She was probably about ten when she left there.

F: Did the brothers and sisters work while she [M: yes] sat around, or what did she do?

M: They worked. They worked in farming and two of the brothers worked as tailors and one of her sisters had already married and her husband, I believe, also worked as a tailor.

F: Was the aim to get to America?

M: Yes.

F: And Paris was only a stopover?

M: Paris was a way to get money to get across because they came only with, as my mother said, "Bags of feathers for their mattresses and pots and pans that they took from home." That's the only thing they brought with them.

F: Do you know what year she got to America? 1917?

M: Probably.

F: And she came on a boat with her six brothers and sisters?

M: Her married sister preceded her to New York, Ellis Island.

F: And so, she came with five brothers and sisters on a boat?

M: Yes.

F: Did she remember the passage? Do you know anything about that trip?

M: No.

F: Did she come to Ellis Island?

M: Yes.

F: Was she met there?

M: The six with her married sister had met her.

F: So, what happened then?

M: They very quickly moved up to Portland.

F: Why?

M: Because they had found people up here who [F: landsmen] were willing to take them in - landsmen - who came from Vilna, as well.

F: So, who moved up here? All of them?

M: No. My mother moved up here and her two brothers moved up here.

F: About 1920? [M: uhhuh] Now, what are the names of the two brothers?

M: Uhm, very interesting! Jacob [pause], and I can't recall the other one.

F: And the last name by then was?

M: Geller.

F: They kept it?

M: Yes.

F: How did they get over here?

M: Harry! He was the other one.

F: What did they do?

M: They worked as peddlers. They both bought horses and they worked out on contracts for the people. They carried goods and merchandise, between Portland and Boston.

F: And the other four remained in New York?

M: In Boston.

F: In Boston!

M: Yes.

F: And what did they do in Boston?

M: They worked in factories.

F: Okay, now, what about the ones left behind?

M: My mother didn't hear from them for several years; and then she heard that one of them had been killed by highwaymen, and one she just never heard from at all because everybody had left by then. All the people who she knew had left.

F: Now, did these seven living in Boston and Portland remain close until they all died?

M: Very, very close. Absolutely, close to this day, yes.

F: What do you mean, are some still alive?

M: Yes, they are. My mother had three sisters who are still living.

F: In Boston?

M: One in Chelsea, one in Dorchester, and one in Revere.

F: And do you know what their husbands do, or did?

M: All three of their husbands have since died. One of them owned a supermarket, and one of them worked in a jewelry store, and one of her sisters married so many times that I've lost track of what her husbands did.

F: So, they remained lower class economically?

M: Yes.

F: And the brothers, too?

M: Yes.

F: But, evidently, they didn't last too long because you can't even remember one of those names very well.

M: Well, I recalled it was Harry. Her brothers died at 87 and 91.

F: Oh, it couldn't have been that long ago, then, was it?

M: No, they have all died within the past five years.

F: Well, how come you couldn't remember the name of an uncle?

M: It just slipped my mind.

F: Okay, you knew them, though?

M: Sure did.

F: The fact of the absence of the name doesn't mean that you didn't know them as your uncles?

M: They were delightful people.

F: Okay, and what were they doing when they died? What was the last job each of them held?

M: They sort of retired when cars started to get on the road. They took their horses off the road and they did odd jobs until then.

F: Did the two brothers get married?

M: Yes, both of them married.

F: Were there a lot of children?

M: No, one or two each.

F: What happened to your first cousins? Are they around?

M: Yes.

F: Are they in this town?

M: A couple of them are.

F: Who are the first cousins in this town?

M: Uh, Robert Geller is still here, and Frances Geller is still here. And those are the two who are here.

F: And what do they do?

M: Robert Geller works for Enterprise Mattress Company; and Frances married and now works for Bernie's.

F: What is her last name?

M: Shatz.

F: All right, now, obviously your mother had a father who was very learned and very Orthodox [M: yes]; but she had to move; and she spent a lot of time on the road, in Paris, and in disruptive circumstances, so it's really a moot point about her growing up in an Orthodox situation in terms of formalism, isn't it?

M: Her family has remained Orthodox throughout their lives.

F: All these brothers and sisters?

M: All of their homes are kosher; all of them observe all of the holidays.

F: Do you think that Jacob and Harry didn't take the horses out on Saturday?

M: Never. They were in Shul on the Sabbath, always.

F: Even though they were 90, did they still walk to Shul?

M: Absolutely, walked until they were no longer able to walk; dressed in white robes on the High Holidays as they did in Europe. They took the robes from Europe - they belonged to their parents - took their robes with them and wore them on the High Holidays, the white kittels on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. They laid tefillon every morning. The women prayed as they did in Russia and Poland, too.

F: And your mother obeyed all of the laws?

M: Yes.

F: Did your mother wear a wig?

M: No.

F: So she made some breaks?

M: Yes.

F: Did anybody in this group wear a wig?

M: Her oldest sister, who died about four or five years ago, wore a wig. That sister never ate meat because she did not trust the butchers in this country. She was a vegetarian from the day she stepped foot in America.

F: Did any of these brothers or sisters who came over to America have a matched marriage in America?

M: Yes.

F: They did?

M: Yes. [pause] Most all of them did.

F: Even your mother?

M: No, not my mother.

F: Uhhuh, was there a matchmaker around to do it?

M: I assume there must have been, probably not a professional, but a brother and a sister.

F: Your father grew up in Minsk. What did his father do?

M: His father delivered the mail from town to town on horseback.

F: What year do you think your father was born, about?

M: 1898.

F: What year do you think he came to America?

M: Probably around 1915.

F: Did he come alone?

M: He came with a single brother.

F: Okay, now, what was the reason for his leaving at such an early age, about 17 years old?

M: Same problem, I think, that my mother had. Living conditions in Russia were very poor. He didn't come here for opportunity; he came here to live, to stay alive!

F: And he left his mother and father behind?

M: Yes.

F: And, they never did come over. [M: no.] What happened to them?

M: They died of natural causes at some time.

F: He came with one brother, did you say?

M: Yes.

F: Did he leave any others back there?

M: He left a sister. He also came from a very large family - 12 or 13.

F: So, what happened to the 12 or 13?

M: Typical diseases of Russia, like bubonic plague.

F: He left a sister?

M: Yes.

F: She never did come over?

M: No. He visited her in 1960.

F: He went to Russia in 1960?

M: Yes, he did. [F: To Russia?] Yes. To visit his sister.

F: What year did your mother die?

M: 1967.

F: At what age?

M: Sixty-two.

F: What year did your father die?

M: 1962.

F: At what age?

M: Sixty-two. Same day, six years apart.

F: What was your father'a name in the old country, his last name and his first name?

M: His name was Israel Katz.

F: And he kept them both?

M: He didn't change it when he went into Ellis Island; they changed it for him, they could not understand. They called him Charles K-A-A-T-Z, and he kept that.

F: Charles what? [M: K-A-A-T-Z] So your name was Cynthia Kaatz, K-A-A-T-Z, until you got married?

M: Yes.

F: And he came with a brother?

M: Yes.

F: They came in 1915. Where did they come?

M: They came through Ellis Island and came up to Portland, as well.

F: How did they get the money to come, do you know?

M: There was probably somebody up here who put out money for them.

F: They knew people in Portland?

M: I think there was an agency here that brought them up to work in the Bath shipyards.

F: Oh, so they went to the Bath shipyards. [M: uhhuh] Did they come from an Orthodox home in terms of formalism?

M: Yes, yes.

F: When did they finally get to Portland?

M: They came very quickly to Portland.

F: So, they spent 1917 here in Portland [M: uhhuh]. What's the other brother's name?

M: Alex.

F: Kaatz, spelled the same way?

M: Yes.

F: So, what did they start doing?

M: Both went to work in the Bath Iron Works at the shipyard.

F: But what about when they came to Portland?

M: That's what they did. The minute they landed, they went to Bath and got a job.

F: When did they come to Portland?

M: Very soon after they landed in New York.

F: No, no, no, Bath is not Portland.

M: They lived in Portland; they worked in Bath. They never lived in Bath; they worked there.

F: Well, how could they possibly get there?

M: By horse.

F: Well, but not in a day. I don't understand; it makes no sense.

M: They used to go up very early Monday morning and leave Friday noontime. They stayed up there at someone's house, but they actually lived in Portland. They stayed up there during the week to work and they came back in town Friday noon.

F: Well, how long did they continue working at the shipyard?

M: Until the war was over.

F: You mean like 1921?

M: Yes.

F: And then they did something in Portland. They got out of Bath.

M: Yes.

F: What did they do in the shipyards?

M: My father was a welder.

F: Okay, had your father had any education before he came to America?

M: What would probably be a second grade education in Russia.

F: He never went continuously to a Yeshiva?

M: No.

F: Was he Bar Mitzvahed?

M: No.

F: Your father wasn't Bar Mitzvahed!

M: No.

F: Well, I thought he came out of a formal, Orthodox home? [M: He did] Well, why wasn't he Bar Mitzvahed?

M: He studied Talmud and he studied Torah with the learned men in the city of Portland but he never went through that.

F: But, why?

M: I have no idea.

F: He was old enough to go through it when he was in Russia.

M: They more than likely didn't even have them then, or they didn't have the time to do them. He worked as a young boy in Russia, as well; he worked from the time he was seven years old, and he worked in the in a Shul for many years [F: in Russia?] [M: uhm].

F: Doing what?

M: Odd jobs around.

F: Okay, now it's about 1921 and both of them came back to work in Portland? [M: uhhuh] Were they married then?

M: His brother was married, yes.

F: To someone he met in Portland?

M: Yes.

F; Okay, your father's living in Portland, and he's about 23 years old now, and he's come back to Portland. What does he do then?

M: He met a gentleman out at a dance by the name of Raymond Callahan, who is an attorney in town and took care of the real estate for one of the banks in town. He got my father a job working on the real estate that banks had repossessed and eventually . . .

F: Fixing them up, you mean?

M: Yes, fixing them up, and eventually my father bought some of those houses, several of them, for himself. They were going very cheap. He fixed them up and he'd sell them again, or he'd keep them, depending on whether it was profitable for him. Mr. Callahan signed a note for $3,000 for him and he bought the first house that way; and, as he sold the house, he made a profit and bought other houses, and he did that for many, many years. He owned a store which sold paint and wallpaper to take care of these homes. That was where his business originated. It was down on 271 Middle Street and, eventually, he owned enough homes and rentals to support himself. In 1949, I brought home a book on architecture and we sat and read this book and he said, "I'm going to build a house. I've always wanted to and I'm going to do it." And he built his first home next door to the Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue on Noyes Street. George Lewis's sister lives in it. She bought it and she still lives in it. And he bought more land on Pitt Street. He built two homes there, since the first one was so successful. He bought more land and, eventually, built five or six hundred homes, and that's what he was doing at the time that he died.

F: What was his company called?

M: It had no name.

F: Where did he build most of his homes?

M: Warwick Heights and Sunset Heights off Brighton Avenue. He built 250 homes there. He built homes on Riverside Street, Dorset Street.

F: So, he really had a good business.

M: He had a very fine business.

F: How would you classify him economically when he died?

M: He was earning about $50,000 a year when he died.

F: Well, so he was middle class.

M: Yes.

F: He came from nothing [M: yuh] to middle class. Now, your mother died when she was quite young. What did she die of?

M: She was a diabetic, so she probably died of heart disease.

F: What did your father die of?

M: Cancer.

F: Of? Everything?

M: He had tumors of the brain and lung. He had had cancer of the kidney about 16 years before.

F: So, they both died at very young ages?

M: Yes.

F: How many children did they have?

M: Three.

F: Where are those kids?

M: I have two older sisters. I have a sister in Cedarhurst, Long Island, and one in Bath, Maine.

F: What does your sister's husband do in Long Island?

M: He is an osteopathic physician who owns a shirt factory, and he has not practiced his profession for about 20 years.

F: And the one in Bath?

M: Owns a hardware store.

F: Are they both Jewish?

M: Yes.

F: Now, how did your father meet your mother?

M: At a dance on Peaks Island.

F: Do you remember what year they got married?

M: No, I don't recall the year they got married.

F: Can you guess?

M: Probably my sister, Lee, is 52 years old; she was born when my mother was 16. [pause] My mother married at 15.

F: This is complicated, [M: yes] doesn't make any sense yet. Wait a minute, uhm, [pause] your sister is 52 years old; she was born when your mother was 16? [M: yes] Let's see. Her mother's born about 1908; she comes to America about 1920, which means she comes when she's about 12 years old, so she's eight or nine when she's going to Paris. Running through the borders, she's a very tiny child then; [M: yes] and she's even younger, she's about three or four or five when her parents are dying. [M: uhhuh] All right, she must have married your father about the same time that he came back to work permanently in Portland?

M: Yes.

F: She was 15 when she married him?

M: Yes.

F: And 16 when she had her first kid?

M: Yes.

F: And your father was not all that old himself. Okay. You know, I think that people with these kinds of families ought to have a family tree that they could hand us instead of having to go through all this. It's the least they could do.

M: It's very difficult; they all lied about their ages crossing the border, getting their passports. The only time they didn't lie is when they took out their citizenship papers, because it was a very, very happy, very proud day. It's the only thing that's even accurate, as I look back.

F: Okay.

M: Because the dates on Mother's wedding certificate are both wrong, the ages are both wrong.

F: So, your oldest sister was born when your mother was 16? [M: right] Where did you live when you were born or growing up?

M: Across the street from Louis Seavey, 24 Vesper Street.

F: Okay, are you the middle?

M: No, I'm the youngest.

F: You were born when your mother was at the old age of 26, right?

M: Right.

F: Now, describe your home, religiously, please.

M: Until I entered public school, I spoke no English because nothing but Yiddish was spoken in the house. We observed all the laws of kashruth; my father took me to the Synagogue with him every Saturday morning.

F: But not every morning of the week or every evening of the week.

M: He went every morning; he did not take me. Everything was traditionally kept in the house. It was a very warm house with relatives there all the time for all the holidays. We built the sukkahs there, too, as my husband and I do now.

F: You didn't speak any English until you were six years old?

M: Right.

F: Well, did your parents speak English? Did they learn English?

M: They started to speak English; they spoke halting English; they still had a very heavy accent right through life and reverted to Yiddish frequently.

F: Could they read fluent English?

M: Yes.

F: How did they learn to do that?

M: Night school. Peggy Bernstein taught my mother how to read; she also took her to the point where she could receive her citizenship papers.

F: Did you have Yiddish newspapers in the home?

M: Yes.

F: Do you remember which ones?

M: Jewish Daily Forward.

F: Did you have Yiddish books?

M: Yes, always.

F: Oh, really!

M: Yes.

F: Those are from New York, I take it.

M: I would assume so. They brought some from Russia with them, too.

F: You could read Yiddish, then?

M: I did not learn to read it; I only spoke it.

F: You were not intellectually curious?

M: I was not intellectual [laugh]; I was curious.

F: Well, did you have any trouble learning English, Cynthia?

M: It was traumatic learning English.

F: Did they put you into the public schools the first day without being able to speak English?

M: Absolutely.

F: And what happened, do you remember? I can remember back to the first grade, can you?

M: I cried a lot.

F: Describe the first grade to me.

M: I went to school with a little girl who lived across the street who was also related, a Jewish girl, and she spoke English. She introduced me to everybody and I could not converse with anybody but her - she also spoke Yiddish. I got a crash course from my oldest sister, Leah, and learned halting English. By the fourth or fifth grade, I spoke it fairly well.

F: Well, you didn't have any difficulty in school, then, or did you have difficulty?

M: I had a great deal of difficulty in kindergarten, subprimary, first, and second grade.

F: But you passed?

M: Yes.

F: Barely?

M: Barely.

F: So you were somewhat deprived?

M: I don't think so. I think that it's just a marvelous language; I thought the kids who spoke English were deprived.

F: But you felt that you were somewhat deprived educationally in this country, then?

M: Yes.

F: You were set back somewhat with what you wanted to do? [M: yes] Can you still speak Yiddish?

M: I do when I have to.

F: How come you don't have any accent anymore?

M: I don't know that; I really don't.

F: All right, why was it that you never had to learn any English to play with the little neighborhood kids?

M: Because the little neighborhood kids spoke Yiddish, too.

F: So you had no contact with any gentile kids?

M: No.

F: At all?

M: None whatsoever.

F: Was this typical?

M: No, I don't think so. My older sisters spoke English. They did not speak it in the home.

F: Did your mother ever have any contacts with any gentiles?

M: Very little.

F: Was that typical?

M: Yes. [pause] My father did because he was in business.

F: That's right. I never asked about your father. Is it typical that the little kids growing up there wouldn't have any little non-Jewish kids to play with?

M: I think my parents sort of set up that pattern for me; they were still a bit afraid of foreigners in America because they had suffered so much in Europe from the non-Jew. They were protecting us.

F: So, there was a fear in your home?

M: Yes.

F: Did your older sisters share that fear?

M: No, they didn't.

F: They actually had non-Jewish friends in school?

M: Many of them.

F: And in later life?

M: And in later life, too.

F: But not your parents?

M: No.

F: And not you?

M: No.

F: What marked you off as different?

M: How do you mean, different?

F: You were different from your sisters in that respect. What made the difference? Because you were the youngest, and you were spoiled and

pampered, or what was it?

M: I was in the home with both my parents for a longer period of time. I saw a lot more of my mother and father, perhaps, than my other two sisters did, because when I got into the first grade, my sister, Lee, who is ten years older than myself, was already graduating from high school. She graduated at 16 from Portland High School, so she was a woman of the world at 16.

F: Did she go to college?

M: Yes, she did.

F: Where?

M: Colby College.

F: Did she graduate?

M: Yes, she did.

F: Do you know what she got a degree in?

M: No, I don't recall.

F: And what about your other sister?

M: She went to B. U. for four years.

F: And you?

M: I went to Mount Ida Jr. College for two years and Emerson College for two years.

F: How old were you when you graduated from high school?

M: Seventeen.

F: Okay, now, you went to public school all these years?

M: Yes.

F: What high school did you go to?

M: Deering.

F: Were there a lot of Jewish kids in the schools?

M: There weren't that many Jewish kids at Lincoln Junior or Deering High School when I was there. There were maybe five or ten. The demographic swing had not taken place yet; there were still people living on Munjoy Hill, so there weren't that many going to Deering.

F: Well, did you relate only to those?

M: Yes.

F: When you were in high school, did you take part in activities and all that?

M: Yes.

F: So, you did that, but you were not friends, is that what you are saying?

M: I participated in most of the organizations which I took an interest in, but I did not have non-Jewish friends.

F: So, at noon you would eat lunch with Jewish friends?

M: Yes. I didn't eat in the cafeteria because, of course, the food wasn't kosher.

F: Oh, so you grew up very Orthodox [M: yes]; you never changed that, at least while you were in [M: no] town here. Okay. What Shul was it, Newbury Street?

M: Yes.

F: Shaarey [M: Shaarey Tphiloh]. I've used that phrase by now at least a thousand times and not once have I ever pronounced it correctly, which is phenomenal. I am now learning the complete pronunciation. Your father remained in that Shul and didn't go anyplace else. You always went there?

M: My father joined the Temple when it was started.

F: Okay, but until the Temple was started, this is where [M: yes] the Kaatz family went [M: absolutely], and they never went anywhere else?

M: Yes.

F: All right, explain your father's religious position in the community. Was he active?

M: No, not at all.

F: Not at all!

M: None whatsoever.

F: But he went on Saturday mornings?

M: Yes.

F: What accounts for his inactivity?

M: He was not interested in any organizational type of activity at all.

He had hobbies which he pursued; but he was a Jew and he knew he was a Jew and felt he need not join any organizations to prove his point.

F: Did he study?

M: Yes.

F: Did he remain interested in Judaism?

M: Yes. We studied Talmud together when he was home Saturday. We studied Torah together on Saturday, just he and I.

F: Well, then, you must have wanted to be Bat Mitzvahed?

M: No, not particularly, that was not a goal.

F: When you went to Synagogue or Shul, you and your mother sat . . .

M: No, I sat with my father.

F: In Shul?

M: Underneath his tallit, I sat on his lap throughout the entire service. I would not go upstairs.

F: Did anyone object?

M: Yes.

F: What form did that objection take?

M: Well, of course, as I approached 12 and 13 I was no longer a little girl. They just didn't want a girl sitting down there with the men [pause], and my father just said, "Tough!" And they didn't do anything about it, so I continued.

F: Well, what about when you became of an age when it just couldn't be accepted anymore?

M: I no longer went to Shul when I couldn't sit with my father; I refused to sit upstairs.

F: And that did come at some point?

M: Yes.

F: When you were 13, 14, 15?

M: Yes, around 13, 14.

F: And that was the break, right?

M: And my mother at that time would not go any more, either. She and I stayed home on the High Holidays frequently, and read religious books. She did this frequently; she was not a person who went to Synagogue, either. She felt she didn't need that.

F: So, when the Temple came along, this was sort of like a godsend for your parents [M: yes] because they could go as a family?

M: We retained dual membership in Shaarey Tphiloh and the Temple.

F: But you went to the Temple?

M: Yes.

F: If your father went, he might go to Shaarey Tphiloh, but if he . . .

M: He went to the Temple because I could sit with him, again because, when they built Noyes Street, they still would not allow that.

F: Well, they don't to this day!

M: No.

F: That was important to you!

M: Very important.

F: Was it important to your father?

M: Yes.

F: He couldn't see any reason why his daughter could not sit with him. He understood why men and women were separated, but he couldn't understand why I couldn't sit with him.

F: He didn't categorize you as a man or woman; you were just his daughter, right?

M: Yes. I believe I was his person, yes.

F: His person!

M: Absolutely.

F: Well, what you're saying is that you were your father's favorite child.

M: I think so.

F: So, you enjoyed studying the Talmud. Did you enjoy studying the Talmud because you wanted to be with your father, or because you wanted to study the Talmud?

M: I found it one of the most fascinating things I have ever read.

F: Do you still study it?

M: Absolutely.

F: Well, when do you study it?

M: When the need is there. I think it is very interesting that God has produced a world and has given us laws and nobody bothers to read them, and they are quite magnificent. It's a way of life that I find nowhere else.

F: You mean you believe that God produced the Talmud?

M: Yes. I think he inspired the scholars to write it and I believe he has inspired me to read it, and I do.

F: Do you read it literally?

M: Yes.

F: Do you read the Old Testament literally?

M: Yes.

F: You believe, then, that the world was created as Genesis states, that Noah did have an ark and that none of these are allegories, but real?

M: I think there's a bit of fantasizing in it, but I accept that, too.

F: So, you don't read it literally?

M: There are a few areas where I question it. I think the ark was a marvelous idea and, even if it were a fantasy, I would have loved to sailed on it. I like to think it would have been worthy to sail on. So, too, with the Queen Elizabeth.

F: Before you went to college, do you remember anything about religious controversy or anything? You had your own controversy with the Shul. Did you ever go to Hebrew school?

M: Never.

F: Why?

M: I think women at that time received private instruction, tutoring. I felt I was getting enough from my father.

F: You were born in 1934, so by that time your home was comfortable?

M: I never knew whether my parents earned two thousand, fifty thousand, or a hundred thousand; it was never discussed in front of me. It was just a very warm home.

F: But did this very warm home have its own bathroom in it?

M: Sure did!

F: All that stuff?

M: All that good stuff.

F: And enough heat in the winter?

M: And enough heat in the winter.

F: Food on the table?

M: Food on the table.

F: And once in a while you got new clothes and not just hand-me-downs?

M: No, I had hand-me-downs.

F: You had hand-me-downs?

M: Uhhuh.

F: So, we're still talking about in the middle of the depression that your parents were struggling?

M: Right.

F: In this town?

M: Right.

F: Did your father work many long hours?

M: Yes, he did.

F: Okay, what year did you start college?

M: 1951.

F: How could that be?

M: They opened the door and I walked in; that's how that could be, I guess.

F: What year did you graduate?

M: From high school?

F: What year did you get a diploma from college?

M: 1955.

F: In other words, you're almost forty-three? [M: yeah] Uh. [M: nearly] Nearly, when does that come?

M: June 26, next year.

F: Now, you have very few memories in terms of the religious or Jewish life of this town in an organizational sense.

M: I belonged to Zionist Youth Organizations.

F: Just a minute, from 1934-51, besides the Zionists, did you do anything else?

M: No.

F: Okay, let's go back. Your parents certainly didn't belong to anything, so we have to talk about what you belonged to, right?

M: My mother belonged to the Council of Jewish Women and Hadassah and the Sisterhood and all those things; my mother was a joiner.

F: But she wasn't active?

M: She was active in the Jewish Community Center during the war.

F: Do you remember going to the Jewish Community Center when you were a kid?

M: Yes!

F: Did you like to go?

M: Yes!

F: What are the things that you remember doing there?

M: They had Sunday school, which Clarice Shur taught.

F: Were you in her Sunday school? [M: and Mildred Drees taught. Yes, I was] Were you in Clarice's Sunday school?

M: Yes.

F: So she knew you as a little kid?

M: Yes.

F: Okay, what else do you remember doing down there?

M: Whatever sports they had,like basketball; they had a bowling alley on the fifth floor.

F: Did they have sports for girls; they let girls play sports?

M: I was an outstanding athlete, and I found my place in the Center. Yes, I had my own groups that came in.

F: You organized them?

M: Absolutely, that's the only way they'd go.

F: In what areas of athletics were you involved?

M: I believe they had a handball court and a basketball court and a bowling alley.

F: So you learned to do all those things?

M: Yes.

F: In a mediocre . . .

M: No, outstanding, really.

F: What about in high school?

M: I played on all the varsity teams from my freshman year on. I received my varsity letter in the beginning of my sophomore year. It had never been done before and has never been done since.

F: In what sports?

M: In all of the varsity sports. I earned it in hockey, in basketball, and softball, and swimming. I rode horseback in high school. My father and I rode horseback through all of the empty places in the city of Portland, on the land my father eventually bought.

F: So, you and he read books together [M: yes]. He had a lot of men working for him, right?

M: Yes, he did.

F: Did you ever go over and pound nails? No, I don't think so because I've watched you try to fix something and that is not something that you learned from your father.

M: I have pounded nails; I have pounded my thumbnails several times!

F: But you did not inherit any of those traits of your father, if I have . . .

M: I know a great deal about building.

F: You may know but you can't do it.

M: Can't do a darn . . . That's right; can't even plug in a toaster.

F: Can't even use a screwdriver, right?

M: Right!

F: All right, I'm trying to get this sorted out. So, you can remember Norman Godfrey?

M: He lived two doors away from me on Dartmouth Street.

F: Do you remember after the war?

M: I was 12 or 13, 14 years old.

F: What did the Zionist group do?

M: I don't even remember.

F: Do you remember going to any camps?

M: Yes, I went to summer camps.

F: You did?

M: Sure did.

F: Where were they?

M: Camp Sunningdale in Sebago.

F: Was it a Jewish camp?

M: Sure was.

F: All right, I've got it. Now is there anything that I have left out until 1951 that should be discussed? We've got you Orthodox, athletic, in the Jewish Community, with no other friends except Jewish friends. [M: right], and a father whom you are very close to who is not that involved, and your mother is in traditional groups; but we haven't got any recollections that we can use in the past that are important.

M: I remember my mother was working for the USO and we had servicemen over during Passover and the High Holidays. The people who came to our home from USO were not always Jewish, I recall that. We had Clark Gable in my house, Victor Mature in my house.

F: Oh, baloney!

M: My sister, Lee, dated Clark Gable!

F: All right! [M: All right] How did Clark Gable and Victor Mature get in your house?

M: Through the front door; they were part of the USO. They came into town to entertain. Clark Gable was stationed at Presque Isle where my sister, Lee, worked. She was on the original project of LORAN, Long Range Navigation, and she met him up there and brought him home for a weekend in town; and he ate at our house. Victor Mature was stationed

in Portland, in the Navy, as was two-thirds of the United States fleet, which very few people knew about. My father was in the Coast Guard so everybody brought home people for dinner. My mother was a very generous cook and very warm woman; she loved to cook and she loved to have people over to the house.

F: So, those were not bad days for you except you weren't old enough to appreciate it.

M: I didn't know what a Clark Gable was. All I knew was he had false teeth.

F: All right.

M: That's the nicest thing I found out about him in twenty years.

F: Do you remember any of the rabbis up to 1951, except as a passing sort of thing in the wind?

M: No, I had a strange experience in 1950. A friend of mine was hurt in an automobile accident. He was in the hospital; he was severely injured. I remember going to the Temple and praying for him. He died within ten days following the accident. I did not return to the Temple until I was around 25 years old.

F: You went away to school?

M: Yes.

F: And, where did you go first?

M: Mount Ida Junior College in Newton Centre.

F: Newton Centre what?

M: Massachusetts.

F: Why did you go there?

M: Because it had riding, golf, and field hockey.

F: Well, was it a fancy school?

M: It sure was.

F: Was it an elite girls school?

M: Oh, absolutely!

F: Elite girls, uhm, [M: yes] one of those [M: one of those] icky places?

M: It was a delightful place, yes.

F: It was expensive to go to?

M: Surely.

F: Is it primarily gentile there?

M: Ninety percent Jewish.

F: Really!

M: Absolutely. I think the day students might have been non-Jews.

F: Did they have kosher food there?

M: My food was kosher, yes, always.

F: Why was your food kosher?

M: I ate nothing but dairy there. I had my own set of dishes there.

F: Why?

M: Because I would not break kashruth.

F: Did you enjoy those two years?

M: Yes, they were enjoyable.

F: Were they terribly academically stimulating?

M: Yes, in many ways. There were some very fine instructors there.

F: So, you grew intellectually, as well as improved your horseback riding?

M: Yes.

F: Did you go to something on Saturday?

M: I went to chapel with everyone else. I didn't care what the service was. It didn't make any difference. I knew there was a God; I just didn't care whose God it was.

F: So, then you went to Emerson. What kind of a school was that?

M: A very fine school.

F: Where is it?

M: It's in Boston.

F: It's not a secretarial school?

M: No, it's not. Drama, theatre, public relations, communications,

journalism, radio, TV.

F: But it's not Jewish?

M: No, but lots of Jewish people attended there, certainly.

F: So, you went from one Jewish school into another and your friends at Emerson were Jewish?

M: Yes.

F: And you still kept up your dishes? [M: everything] Everything?

M: Yes.

F: What kind of a degree did you get?

M: I had a BA degree.

F: In what?

M: Journalism.

F: Journalism! What did you plan to do with it? What did you have visions of doing?

M: While I was in Emerson, I took several courses in public speaking. Emerson people went out to the radio stations and to the churches, or any organizations that asked us to speak, and I went out many, many times. I enjoyed that very much and I guess that's really what I wanted to do.

F: Did you enjoy your two years at Emerson?

M: Found them very stimulating.

F: When you got out, what did you think you were going to do? Did you have any career plans or anything like that?

M: I wanted to write.

F: Okay, did you ever write?

M: I wrote very, very little; I wrote for organizations. I wrote scripts.

F: So then you spent the next few years in Boston doing different things?

M: I worked for WEMS in Boston, which is a classical music station which came out of the school. I believe it is still in existence.

F: So, you graduated from college in 1955, and when did you come back to Portland?

M: 1958, 1959.

F: 1959?

M: Sketchily, in those times. I was back and forth.

F: Well, what year did you get married?

M: 1962.

F: Okay, 1962, so you did a number of different things when you were in Boston, for a few years. You came back to Portland in 1959, you think?

M: Either that or 1960. I was back and forth quite a bit.

F: 1955 to 1960 [M: yes], were you an Orthodox Jewess?

M: Yes.

F: How did you define being Orthodox between 1950 and 1960?

M: I still observed the Sabbath in the manner in which it was done in my own home. I still kept kosher. I still read my books. I just didn't want to go into formal institutions.

F: You mean, from 1955 to 1960 you did not break kashruth?

M: No.

F: Well, in Boston what would you go to - a Reform or Conservative . . .

M: I belonged to a Kehillath Israel.

F: Orthodox?

M: It is a Conservative temple with about 2500 members. It's in Brookline.

F: It's a biggie?

M: Yes.

F: Did you find that satisfying?

M: Not really, because I didn't find any of the Conservative temples, until I came into Temple Beth El, that stimulating to me religiously. The rabbis are very fine. I went into study groups, which I find very interesting. I worked for UJA those years.

F: So, you never broke your Orthodoxy?

M: No, never found a better way.

F: When did you finally break it?

M: I think when I got back to Portland. My father had become ill and I just couldn't do all the things I was doing before. I broke the Sabbath at that time; I didn't break kashruth; but I did eat in restaurants.

F: Well, when you were living in Boston all those years, you never ate in restaurants?

M: Kosher restaurants; there was one in Dorchester that was very fine.

F: But, other than that, you didn't go out and eat?

M: No, I ate at people's homes, mostly.

F: And were most of your friends Jewish? Up to 1960?

M: No, I had several non-Jewish friends. They weren't close. I guess we were pretty much interested in the same things.

F: You were brought up Orthodox; you continued Orthodox to an extent not usually seen in those years. Am I right?

M: Yes.

F: And you were those years determining your own relationship to God and you had your own views, right? [M: certainly]. It might or might not, in those years, include temple or shul. That varied from time to time.

M: That's right.

F: We're at 1960 now. I'm going to go back now, because you are no longer defining yourself as an Orthodox Jew.

M: No.

F: I would, but you wouldn't.

M: No.

F: So, we have something to come to in terms of a change; because, until about age 26, you have a holding pattern. It's not the norm, coming from Portland and college and Boston, and everything else. You're more strict than would be the norm in those days, am I not correct?

M: I think probably the reason why I kept it up was because I still had aunts who lived around Boston. I visited their homes, usually on the holidays. I didn't come home for the High Holidays, then. I stayed right in Boston and went to their homes for dinner or wherever they were going, and they, of course, remained extremely, ultra Orthodox.

F: Okay, you say your father went to Russia in 1960. How did that happen?

M: Yes, he had gotten word that the sister he had left there was still alive. He had brought his deceased brother's wife and children to the United States in 1959. They had written to him and said they would very much like to leave Russia and they were granted permission to leave. So he arranged a place for them to stay in New York and he took care of them financially. He brought them over here and took care of them financially, the whole family, a sister-in-law, a mother-in-law, and, I think, two children. The mother-in-law eventually emigrated to Israel, but his sister-in-law and her two children still live in New York. He brought them over here and he found out that his sister was still alive. He had not seen her for forty years and he was determined to go back and see her. He came home one night and he said to my mother, "I'm taking Cynthia to Russia with me and I'm leaving in three weeks." And my mother was ill at the time; she just felt as though I couldn't leave, and so I did not, but he was gone for six or seven months, I think.

F: Six or seven months!

M: Yes.

F: Did he have any trouble getting into Russia?

M: No.

F: What did he do while he was there?

M: He met a woman who lived next door to him who was an administrator of buildings in Minsk. She took him for a tour of the Russian buildings, everything that was being built: private residences and commercial buildings and military establishments. He visited every place in Russia he had ever wanted to go.

F: So, he really enjoyed it.

M: Yes, he did.

F: And he felt good about Russia when he came back?

M: Yes, very much. I, of course, feel the same way. He had some very fond memories of Russia, too, in Minsk. Of course, he wanted to see his sister but he wanted to go back to Russia, too, I think. Certainly not to see a lot of the things he saw before but he had a feeling for Russia and he went back there.

F: Did he have a positive feeling about Russia's treatment to Jews when he came back?

M: No. His sister had children who had no religion. He visited synagogues with his sister and they had to go at night to visit them. And his sister and his niece and nephew had been persecuted. They were not

allowed into the schools; they held menial jobs.

F: So, if I am right, in the way that you would think, it would be a fine way to end one's life.

M: I think so. I think it is marvelous.

F: Because he died shortly after.

M: Yes, he did.

F: All right, now, am I right that we can start with you in 1960; is there something else that I should be asking you up to 1960?

M: I don't think so.

F: So, we can go on to the Jewish community in this town and its organizations.

M: Yes.

F: You got married when?

M: 1962.

F: 1962. How old were you when you got married?

M: I can't remember it's so long ago; it has to be thirteen years ago. I was 27.

F: You were 30.

M: Twenty-nine, I don't remember. I told you I have no idea; it was very vague to me.

F: And where did you meet your husband?

M: I met him at my house on Rosh Hashanah. My mother used to have people over from the Temple always at the break of the services from the Temple. She used to have 40 or 50 people and he came in with his mother.

F: Were his parents born in America?

M: His father was born in Russia; his mother was born in this country.

F: And his father came from Russia as a young man? [M: yes] To Portland?

M: Yes.

F: And what was his name?

M: Mack, Samuel Mack.

F: Samuel Mack. What did his father do?

M: His father was a tailor in Russia; he came here without his parents; and he owned, I believe, a hardware store in Bath. Chuck's mother divorced him in the Thirties, I think.

F: They're both Jewish?

M: Yes. It was rare that they were divorced. She then married Samuel Elowitch, and I think Samuel Elowitch had eight children and Mr. Elowitch, I believe, lived for maybe just a couple years after that. His mother opened a shop in town, a woman's clothing shop. She then in 1947 married Maurice Branz. His mother had a very tough life.

F: And when did she die?

M: In 1961.

F: What about his father?

M: His father died in 1947.

F: So, he's a son of an immigrant father. Did he go to college?

M: Yes.

F: Where did he go to college?

M: He went to Lowell Textile Institute and Bowdoin.

F: Did he graduate?

M: Yes.

F: From Bowdoin?

M: From Lowell Textile.

F: What does that mean?

M: It's now called Lowell Technical Institute or something, I don't know, really don't.

F: Did he go into business?

M: Yes, he worked for some mills in Bath for a while.

F: And what does he do now?

M: He works as an advertising agent for Geiger Brothers in Lewiston.

F: But does he work here in Portland?

M: Yes, he works out of Portland.

F: So what is his profession then, advertising?

M: He's an advertising consultant.

F: Okay, now, before he worked there, did he work in any businesses around here in that capacity?

M: He worked in New York in textiles and, when he came up here, he went to work for Geiger Brothers.

F: You have one daughter?

M: Yes.

F: And was she born fairly soon after you got married?

M: Fairly soon.

F: Wait a minute, do you remember your wedding?

M: I sure do!

F: Where was it?

M: At Temple Beth El.

F: Who performed the service?

M: Rabbi Sky.

F: What was it like; describe a Temple Beth El wedding.

M: It was not the usual type of wedding that takes place at Temple Beth El. It was not held in the sanctuary; it was held in the small chapel. The hupah, which is normally held up by posts or rails, or what have you, in the sanctuary was held up by four men as it is traditionally done in Europe. There were very few people. There was a minyan and there was my very close family and that was all who saw the service. It was a very private service; it was not a public type of thing. The invited guests were not all in the chapel when the wedding took place.

F: This is in 1962?

M: Yes.

F: Were both your parents dead then?

M: My father at that time was very ill; my mother-in-law had died a year before; my mother was alive.

F: And both your mother and your father were at the wedding?

M: No, my father was terminally ill then. He had been in the hospital for about a year.

F: So, when you first got married, in what part of Portland did you live?

M: My mother-in-law, I think, owned a home out in Cape Elizabeth. I'm trying to think of where we were. I think we lived on Noyes Street.

F: How long have you lived in that little box out in the woods?

M: My salt box. I have lived there for eight, nine years.

F: So, what we're talking about with you is a contribution to the Jewish community in a fourteen-year-period; that's what we're getting at.

M: That's what we're getting at.

F: Well, why couldn't you have said so in the beginning? First, have you done anything between 1962 and 1976 in the non-Jewish community?

M: I sat on the United Way Board of Directors, on the Maine Humane Society Board of Directors, and the American Red Cross, and on the Board of Directors of Volunteers in Public Schools; that's about it.

F: Of what organizations in the Jewish community have you been an officer or a member of the board of directors?

M: I have been a vice president of Hadassah.

F: Do you remember when?

M: I went to a meeting in 1962 and told them that I would start off as an officer since I, obviously, was very bad Indian material [F: laughter]; and they accepted that. So, at the next meeting, I became an officer.

F: Any other organizations that you have been involved with?

M: I have been a vice president of the Center Women's Club, vice president of the Jewish Community Center Board of Directors.

F: When were you that?

M: 1972.

F: Vice president in charge of what?

M: Day Camp.

F: And when were you vice president of the Center Women's Club?

M: 1975.

F: Anything else in the Jewish community?

M: President of the Sisterhood in 1969, 1971.

F: President from 1969 to 1971?

M: Yes.

F: President of the Temple Beth El Sisterhood. Is that all?

M: Well, I sit on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Home for the Aged.

F: Since when?

M: Two years, 1974 until the present. I am on the Board of Directors of Temple Beth El.

F: Since when?

M: Since 1969.

F: 1969 to when?

M: Presently, a member, as well.

F: How many members are there on the board of directors?

M: Thirty-two.

F: Anything else?

M: I'm the only woman on the religious affairs committee of the Temple.

F: How long have you been on that?

M: Two years. I sit on the Vaad Hakashruth as the only woman member.

F: How many members are there on that?

M: Eight.

F: How many years have you been doing that?

M: Two years. I think those are the only organizations I am involved with.

F: Well, you have not been involved with the Federation.

M: Yes, I have been a leader in several different categories in Federation since I returned to Portland.

F: Like?

M: Well, there are different categories. There's pacesetters' and there's

women's neighborhood division; I have been a captain in that for two or three years. I have been on the bond drives for about five years. I was a member on the Board of Directors of the Shaarey Tphiloh Sisterhood in 1969 and 1970 and 1971.

F: You have joint membership in both still?

M: No.

F: Do you have anything to do with the Hebrew School?

M: Yes, I was on the Hebrew School committee when it formed the Community Hebrew School.

F: What year was that?

M: It's been four years now, 1972.

F: Anything else?

M: Nope.

F: You have not yet managed to breach the walls of the Brotherhood?

M: I have no desire to.

F: Wrong time, right?

M: No, I attend their Sunday morning breakfasts because they are so stimulating.

F: Are you sure we have everything?

M: I hope so.

F: Seems to me there must be more than that. Have you received any awards from the Jewish community?

M: Yes.

F: What?

M: I have received the National Women's League's Woman of Valor award in 1972.

F: And that is from what?

M: The National Women's League; it is a conservative movement.

F: Woman of Valor [M: United Synagogue, yes]. Woman of Valor! Okay, any other awards?

M: No.

F: Any memorial dinners?

M: I haven't died yet!

F: All right, have you had any testimonials?

M: No.

F: They never had a dinner for you, or anything?

M: Never, too young.

F: Why are we interviewing you? [Laughter] All right, we're moving backwards now.

M: Oh, good!

F: Let's take Hadassah. Not only have you been vice president, it looks like you have been always a vice president and never a president except for the Sisterhood. But, all right, that will come when you're older, correct?

M: No.

F: Now, I assume that, in addition to being vice president of Hadassah, you have been a constant member of Hadassah.

M: Absolutely. I'm a life member and so is my daughter.

F: Now, why did you join Hadassah and devote time and energy to it?

M: Because it is a Zionist organization; I believe in the state of Israel.

F: From 1962 to 1976 can you describe changes, directions, developments and those things in Hadassah?

M: Hadassah is basically an organization of the older members from the city of Portland. They are the nucleus. I think the average age is probably 60-plus; and I found, in order to continue the organization, it would have to have younger people. So, when I came in, I took several members with me and they are still active today. I felt it was dying out and needed some youth and I was not young myself at the time, but I felt that I could help it.

F: What are the main things that Hadassah does?

M: It supports the hospital in Israel, the Hadassah hospital, which is one of the finest in the world. It supports Youth Aliyah movement and migration, Jews to Israel from all countries of the world. It is basically a national organization and a fund-raising organization, and it is educational.

F: So, when you look back, what are the major things that you have seen

happen to Hadassah since you have been a member?

M: I think it has revived considerably. It was really going down because the older members were not contributing as much as they did before, financially, yes, but they were not there.

F: Well, in 1976 would you say that it's alive and well, or is it dwindling again?

M: It is living and well, yes. I believe there are a lot of young people coming into it now and I have always worked on membership and I have always managed to bring in 20 new members every single year since I joined Hadassah.

F: In some cities, is it not true that Hadassah is the "creme de la creme" [M: in Boston it is, absolutely], sort of like Junior League [M: absolutely, in Boston, it is that]? It is <u>the</u> thing to belong to.

M: The donors' dinners in Boston, which support Hadassah hospital in Israel, I think cost $50 for a ticket. I was not a member of Hadassah but I attended all of the dinners for as long as I can remember when I was in Boston because I believed in the organization. It has done some magnificent work.

F: It's also the thing to do in some places, isn't it?

M: It probably is.

F: But that is not the case here, is it?

M: No. I guess people join it here out of tradition more than anything else.

F: Now, you have been a member of the Center Women's Club since 1962?

M: Yes.

F: Are you a life member?

M: No, I'm not.

F: Wait a minute.

M: I'm a life member of Hadassah.

F: You haven't said anything about the Council of Jewish Women.

M: I do not belong to the Council of Jewish Women out of my own choosing.

F: All right, we're going to the Council of Jewish Women. Why do you not belong to the Council of Jewish Women? That is significant as the only Jewish group in this city to which you could belong but you have not belonged.

M: I financially support it; I will not join it.

F: Well, why will you not join it?

M: I find that I am not interested in the things that they do. The scholarships are the only thing I contribute to financially. It seems to be a very social type of organization and I don't really need that.

F: Is it alive and well?

M: It is [pause] living. I don't know how well it is. I think some of the mainstays have sort of backed off a little bit.

F: It did serve a purpose at one time?

M: It certainly did and it probably does now. It just doesn't suit my purpose. I don't feel that I can contribute to an organization I just don't believe in.

F: What is the major thing you don't believe in?

M: The meetings are basically of a social type. The discussions are not that which I am interested in. I find the people who belong to it, even though they belong to Sisterhood as well, are different people. They wear different hats in Council and it is what Hadassah is to Boston. And I don't need that.

F: Now, Center Women's Club, you have been a member of it for . . .

M: For ever and ever and ever.

F: Okay, what are the kinds of things that you remember it has done?

M: Well, Center Women's Club, basically, is an auxiliary of the Center, and it is a very similar type of thing as the Sisterhood is to the Temple. It contributes to the upkeep of the building, and it also supports the Center Day Camp, which I am very interested in.

F: When you look back on the Center Women's Club since 1962, what changes or developments or directions do you see it taking?

M: I find the membership dwindling because the membership of the Center is dwindling.

F: Has this been steady since 1962?

M: Absolutely, steady since 1962.

F: Has it gone like this?

M: It has gone down so rapidly it's hard to believe that it's happened; because, at one time, it was <u>the</u> organization to belong to.

F: And how do you account for that?

M: Well, obviously, it's because the Center has gone downhill, too.

F: I'll take that up under the Center, then. What does it still do; the maintenance of the building?

M: It still supports the Day Camp and it still supports the building. The general meetings are not particularly interesting, so I don't usually attend.

F: What do you think will happen to it? It's got a long tradition in this city.

M: I think that the Center Women's Club with or without the Center will continue because of the Day Camp.

F: It all revolves around the Day Camp?

M: Yes.

F: Now, you have been vice president of the Jewish Community Center Board of Directors, and involved in the Jewish Community Center since 1962?

M: Yes.

F: What are the changes that you have seen occur in the Community Center over a fourteen year period?

M: Well, I think membership has decreased so much that the programming does not meet the needs of the day of the Jewish community. The Jewish community has become a part of the Portland social scene: symphony, country clubs, theatre. Tennis has taken a lot of people away from the Center, I think. It's become a very popular Jewish sport now, which it never has been because most of the clubs excluded Jewish people, most of the better clubs. I don't mean <u>better</u>; I mean the tennis service was better.

F: It's a case again, in part, from what you are saying, of the other community, the bigger community opening up and of Jews being accepted to some extent. Everyone's a part of everything. Do you think that this has a something a little too bad to it, at the same time?

M: Sentimentally, I feel very badly about the decline of the Center. My mother had many happy years there and, as a youth, I enjoyed going down there for the social activities.

F: Has it been revived in any of these years?

M: I think in 1972, when Yudy Elowitch took over as president. I think this is why I became a member of the Executive Board, because I felt he is a very strong leader; he is an easy man to follow, to work with, and I think he had some very fine ideas. One, of course, was the merging

of Federation and the Center for financial reasons. And I think during those two years many changes took place which is why it's even open today. He reorganized the entire board of directors and everything that they did. Everybody felt they were contributing, instead of having a leader who did everything. Everybody was assigned things and we all did our job, and we became interested again.

F: But it wasn't enough?

M: I think when you get into problems such as double digit inflation and dwindling membership, you certainly have a problem.

F: Well, it's no secret that this is a matter of concern to the entire Jewish community one way or another; so when I ask people their opinions on this, I feel freer asking them about this than any other single thing because there is a consensus of at least concern about it, right?

M: Yes.

F: It's not under the table and it's not in back rooms; it's a very open concern. What do you think, first of all, should happen to the Jewish Community Center?

M: I would have closed the door two years ago. I would have sold the building. I see the only future for that is a new physical plant. I think the Jewish Community Center need not have a physical plant in order to continue its operation. I think they can use the facilities which are available in town, such as the Y and the Tennis Racket and other clubs that are around, and still function as Jewish people going to different types of activities.

F: Oh, use the other facilities just as those people in those facilities used the Jewish Community Center until they got theirs? [M: yes] Just reverse it. [M: absolutely] I see. What percentage of people do you think agree with your view?

M: Certainly the majority of the people agree that the Center serves truly no function.

F: Is this talked about openly in your groups?

M: Certainly is. It has been talked about for two years. The only reason I go to the Center now are to meetings, to dinners. That's really the only reason I am down there.

F: When do you think this issue will be faced, or is it being faced?

M: It is being faced right now. They've tried to do a few things that will financially help the building, but I really see no future in it. I think the United Way is backing off; I think rightly so. They have contributed a great deal, certainly, to the Jewish community; but I think it's just a matter of time now. I think the projected budget

for 1977 cannot be met in any way unless the Federation is willing to pop in between sixty and eighty thousand dollars a year. I don't think it can be maintained financially, and that's where it's at.

F: So, you think it will be in trouble in the next two years, that soon?

M: I think it's right there now. I think as we look at a projected budget, it cannot exist.

F: All right, what functions do you think should remain and list them, please.

M: The only programs that are worthwhile and functioning at the time are the youth programs, and they start at three and a half years old until 18. There's the Center Youth, which is a high school organization which cannot possibly compete with the United Synagogue Youth, which is an arm of the Temple, because the Temple and the Sisterhood both financially support the United Synagogue Youth in all of its activities, and the Center cannot afford to do that. I think the majority of the youth in town probably are members of the Temple at this time. The Hebrew School points out that because 85 percent of the membership of our Hebrew School is from the Temple families. Obviously, the kids are torn between Center Youth and USY, and USY just offers them a bit more. So, I think that it will be defunct within a year. There weren't that many members last year. But I think the younger groups, the kids who play basketball down there, the boys particularly, enjoy this very much. They play three times a week.

F: Can that be done someplace else?

M: Absolutely. If you sold the building, hopefully, to United Way, they could rent the gym back and not have this $110,000 overhead for the use of the gym, which is ridiculous.

F: Okay, and the Center Day Camp would be called something else and would continue?

M: It could be called the Center Day Camp and could be run out of a closet somewhere with a typewriter and a telephone.

F: Anything else that would continue?

M: The Sunday programming for the younger children offers very fine programs, but they could be run anywhere. They could be run at the Temple or the Shul very easily. This building doesn't offer that much; it only offers rooms. The same personnel could be used anywhere else.

F: Anything else that you would like to say about the Jewish Community Center?

M: In the Forties, I think many wedding receptions were held there, obviously, because there was a kosher kitchen. There were not the facilities in the Shul to hold these things. I think that was one of its purposes.

I think they bought the Jewish Community Center building in 1938 and most of the social functions in the city took place in the Center, for obvious reasons. There was no room anywhere else. There were even weddings held at the Center, as I recall. Its heyday was in the Forties, during the war, when the USO was functioning with, perhaps two to three hundred members. I think, since 1950, most of the functions held there were of an athletic nature. All of the Jewish organizations, with the exception of the Sisterhoods, hold their meetings there, again because of the kitchen being kosher. I think the leadership has changed. I don't think they have a following anymore. The founders are no longer active in the Center, although they continue to financially support it. I think it is a sentimental $110,000 toy which has to be gotten rid of.

F: Let's go to Temple Beth El Sisterhood, then.

M: Magnificent!

F: You've been in it since 1962?

M: Yes.

F: What have you seen as the changes and developments in it and what does it do?

M: It is one of the strongest, most active organizations in the city of Portland, and has been since 1962.

F: What are its goals?

M: Its goals are to educate Jewish women. It has groups studying Torah and Talmud. It supports United Synagogue Youth; it takes care of the building; and, of course, we're now involved in the religious aspects of the building, which was, I think, in the back of many of our minds since 1962. It was one of the first temples across the country to see the light on women being part of the service; we have worked very hard towards it; and we have finally attained it. It's the age groups involved - the very young join it as the very old continue their membership. I think it is a very strong movement in the city.

F: Is it the largest organization?

M: It certainly is. There are 423 members of the Temple and there are 390 members of Sisterhood. So, you can see, obviously, that women do join it, do retain their membership, and do financially support it. It has an income of $18,000 a year and they spend about $13,000 towards the maintenance of the Temple, towards whatever religious artifacts are necessary. It supports outside activities, as well. I think it supported Shalom House. It gives grants now and then to organizations that come to it. The meetings are well attended. You have a very wide cross-section of the Jewish community belonging to it and being very active in it. Temple is not just a building; it's almost a way of life for Sisterhood members. One does not just belong to the Temple; one <u>loves</u> the Temple.

That is why, I think, the membership has kept up. It has teaching workshops on kashruth and on preparation for holidays. It encourages its members to attend services. It has its own services frequently. I just find it to be a very fine organization and I'm very proud to be a member of it.

F: At the same time that you were an officer of Temple Beth El Sisterhood, you were on the board of directors of Shaarey Tphiloh Sisterhood, [M: yes] and I assume that you were associated with that Sisterhood since 1962?

M: Yes.

F: What do you see as the development or changes in that group?

M: Seventy-five percent of the members of that Sisterhood are sixty-plus age. There does seem to be a resurgence of the younger crowd going in there now. Those members who seem to be joining Shaarey Tphiloh now are, I believe, going to lead the life of Torah. They are not just joining it because their parents joined. They are moving to the city of Portland and adopting an Orthodox way of life, and that is certainly very pleasing to hear and notice.

F: Is it a very large group?

M: Twenty-five, thirty young couples have joined it for other reasons than their parents belonging to it.

F: But I mean of Sisterhood.

M: Their Sisterhood, I think, has 250 members, and I think they have 400 members of the Synagogue. I think 50 percent join.

F: But those members are not as active?

M: No, they're not. They have a great deal of difficulty running an organization because the members are older and they feel they have put in their time already; the younger ones don't seem to have the time or want to do this type of work.

F: Let's move to the Jewish Home for the Aged because I don't imagine you have anything else to say about Sisterhood, do you?

M: No.

F: All right, now, is this your first association with the Jewish Home?

M: Right, I'm a life member, and have been for several years, but I have not been on the board of directors.

F: What does it mean to be a life member of all this, how much?

M: How much does it cost? It costs $150, I believe, to be a life member.

F: Now, why did you go on the board of directors of the Jewish Home for the Aged?

M: I think because of the president, David Turitz. I think he is a very fine young man coming up in Jewish leadership, and I think he asked me to come on because any organization I join I work for and I give a great deal of my time to.

F: What does the board of directors do?

M: Uh, they discuss the problems of the institution. It is a nursing home and it has all of the problems of any nursing home. Two-thirds of the occupants are not Jewish, although we do maintain a Sabbath service every Saturday morning, and they do maintain Passover Seder. They celebrate all of the holidays there. What we do is we oversee them, make sure that they have minyans and that they have the religious tools to operate. We do deal with the hiring of personnel and with institutional problems, you know, physical plant problems, and with the change in the growth of the nursing homes in the city of Portland. Basically, it is heavily supported by Jewish people, but also heavily supported by the non-Jewish community.

F: Does it pay for itself?

M: Yes, it does.

PA: May I ask one question? Does it also celebrate gentile holidays?

M: Yes, it does.

F: Is it alive and well?

M: It certainly is.

F: Will it last?

M: It will last.

F: There's a need?

M: There is a need. Yes, there is a definite need.

F: What are the major problems it faces?

M: Well, I think in the past two years, two new nursing homes have come up of a religious nature. I think one is Catholic; and St. Joseph's, I believe, has been built during the past two years. It faces a problem of too many beds [F: you mean competition?] in the city for the need it serves, although it has, supposedly, the finest nursing care in the state as far as a nursing home goes. It is heavily endowed from years back by the Jewish community. They own stocks and bonds.

F: So the Jewish community is paying for gentile nursing care?

M: In the physical plant, absolutely. The Home would not be there without

Jewish support, and they do have a women's auxiliary, as well, supporting it. But everybody, I think, at some time or other during the year gives small amounts, $25, $50, to support it. That's a very fine institution. It has built modern wings on it recently.

F: And it has good health care?

M: The finest health care, really very fine. As I say, it has built a modern wing within the past four or five years, built with Jewish money, certainly. But, in order to run the institution, it's the day-by-day income that counts. The people who are occupying the beds are paying for its year-to-year funding. It is highly recommended by the doctors in the city because the care is so good. And many of the doctors who serve there, serve for nothing. Ben Zolov is there, Fred Schwartz is there, and Brian Dorsk is there. Many times they are there without pay. They set up a lot of seminars and certainly don't receive any remuneration for that. So, a lot of the service there is volunteer, both by the professional and the lay community.

F: Let's move to Vaad Hakashruth. What is the main function of that organization now?

M: Vaad Hakashruth came from the original organization which, I believe, was called Vaad Harabonim, which is the keeper of holiness both in kashruth, and also oversees the mikvah, of which there are two. I think only one is in operation now, the one which was recently built on the premises of Shaarey Tphiloh. It is maintained through grants from Federation. The building, built last year, cost $40,000. We have a woman who oversees the operation of the mikvah. It has to be overseen by another person, a pious woman. I believe, up until recently, this was Tama Fineberg's mother.

F: Could you describe the mikvah? Where is it?

M: It is on the premises of Shaarey Tphiloh on Noyes Street.

F: Can it be visited?

M: Yes, it can be visited.

F: Is it used?

M: Yes, it is used.

F: How much is it used, a lot?

M: There are maybe 30 to 40 women who use it religiously. They use it whenever there is a need to use the mikvah.

F: Do you use it?

M: I have been to the mikvah before I got married. I have not been back to it since. I did not attend the mikvah in Portland; I attended one in

Boston which was similar to a Roman bath. It was delightful. I'm sorry I hadn't found it until then. It was beautiful, very lovely. The one in town is efficient, practical. It has changing rooms and it has the immersion baths.

F: Do you remember the mikvah from earlier days?

M: I went to the Newbury Street mikvah with my mother, I think when I was 13 or 14. It was horrible, [F: laughter] really horrible, and I was terrified; I am no longer terrified but I no longer go.

F: Do you believe that the mikvah will exist as long as Jews exist?

M: It sure will.

F: All right, you work for this but you wouldn't use it.

M: I don't know that I won't use it. I will take my daughter there probably in the next two years.

F: As a symbolistic thing?

M: I think, yes. I was taken there at 14. I think my daughter will visit, hopefully, very soon.

F: Let's go back to Vaad Hakashruth again. With the exception of the mikvah, what do you do on this board?

M: We oversee kashruth in the city. We at one time had three kosher butcher shops. We now have one, S. Blumenthal & Sons. I believe there is another one. It is also overseen, but I can't even remember the name of it.

F: When you talk about overseeing it, let us, for once, get down to reality. What <u>exactly</u> do you do to oversee it?

M: We assure the people of the city of Portland who maintain kashruth that the meat that comes from that butcher store is kosher.

F: Fine, but that still doesn't answer our question. In reality, what is done by this board?

M: We occasionally have problems that come up with kashruth in these butcher stores which we then sit down and discuss and, hopefully, overcome.

F: Have you ever had to call a . . .

M: Beth din?

F: Yup.

M: Yes. About five years ago. Yes, it was held in Boston; it was not held in town.

F: How much supervision actually goes into this?

M: Lots of it. It is visited once a week, by the Orthodox rabbi. The koshering of the meat is watched by a Michael Moskowitz, who is a very pious Jew. He knows how to kosher meat.

F: Does he watch it all the time?

M: He sure does. He comes in once or twice a week. He knows the minute the meat comes in by truck. He goes down and watches it being unpacked and he watches it being koshered.

F: But nobody checks it on the other end?

M: Yes, it is checked before it leaves and it is checked when it gets here.

F: That's beef we're talking about?

M: Yes.

F: I'm talking about chickens.

M: Chickens are usually tagged before they come in.

F: So nothing is slaughtered here anymore?

M: No, there used to be a slaughter house here in town but it is no longer here.

F: Is it true that this meat is considerably more expensive than what one would buy if it weren't koshered?

M: Not considerably more. I would say maybe 30, 40 cents a pound more.

F: Is there a good business for this?

M: There is a very fine business. It supports four or five families in town, I think, very nicely. And the organizations, Hadassah, both Sisterhoods, Center Women's Club, and Center Day Camp, use the kosher meat, naturally. I will not go into the other organizations that don't.

F: Does this have anything to do with, uhm, Chevra . . .

M: The Chevra Kadishah is a very old society and has nothing to do with the Vaad Hakashruth. The Chevra Kadishah is run by maybe seven or eight men who attend to the washing of the bodies.

F: So, the only thing you worry about here is food and baths.

M: Food and those kitchens which supposedly are kosher. They are checked.

I am a mishgiach appointed by Rabbi Sky to oversee the Temple kitchen. I also do this at the Center at the commission of Rabbi Dworken. A mishgiach is usually present when the kosher kitchens are being used in town and he receives a sum of money for doing this. Of course, I charge no fee because I am not worth it. Obviously, it's a pleasure to do it.

F: You do not keep a kosher kitchen, correct?

M: Yes, I do keep a kosher kitchen.

F: You do!

M: Of course.

F: You have different sinks?

M: Yes, I have two sinks in my house.

F: You don't mix the dishes?

M: No, I don't mix the dishes.

F: Silverware?

M: No, don't mix the silverware, don't mix the dish towels.

F: Do you have a dishwasher?

M: Yes.

F: How do you handle that?

M: Well, obviously, if you have a meat meal at night, you wash the meat mealthing through it and when you have a milk meal, you wash those dishes separately. It's sort of simple.

F: You don't ever mix them up?

M: I imagine, at times. I don't purposely say, "Hey, let's mix them!"

F: Well, all right, the Hebrew School. The Hebrew School was formed in 1972.

M: The Community Hebrew School was formed in 1972.

F: Okay, would you explain what led up to that?

M: I think, basically, it was a financial problem in that they were . . .

F: What was in existence prior to that?

M: Both Shul and Temple had their own Hebrew Schools, different faculties;

and therefore, support of different faculties. It was very expensive to do that because there were 14 members of the Hebrew School at Shaarey Tphiloh which was receiving $14,000 for the operation. Temple had 120 members and it was receiving $14,000. It seemed rather a shame not to combine the two somehow; and, since Federation heavily supports and underwrites this, Federation decided that it would be a very fine idea if the schools were brought together.

F: Was there a controversy?

M: There sure was. I was asked to sit on the committee and I refused to. I really did not want the two to combine. I am somewhat of a purist. I felt the type of Hebraic upbringing at the Shul was far more superior to that of the Temple, and so I was opposed to it. Having seen the pieces fall into place, I naturally supported it; but idealistically, I like them separated. I realize, financially, they could not be that way.

F: And your daughter?

M: Well, she's been in Hebrew Schools five years so she was there before it was changed, too.

F: Which grade is she?

M: And she naturally graduated from the Community Hebrew School this year; but her upbringing at home is certainly not that of a Conservative Hebraic upbringing.

F: What would be the basic difference that existed before the merger?

M: The study of kashruth would differ because of the Conservative viewpoints on that. I felt that one should be brought up in the Orthodox and then, as a young adult - whenever that is attained, 12, 20, 30 - they could then choose what they wanted; but I felt they should know the Orthodox, and the Temple is not teaching that. The laws of kashruth are so extremely different.

F: Well, what are the major differences?

M: Oh, basically in the preparation of food. There are certain foods that the Conservative Jewish movement considers kosher and the Orthodox doesn't, such as jello. Jello comes from the lining of a forbidden animal's stomach, and the Conservative movement feels that in its chemical process, it becomes a neuter type of thing and not a fleishig type of thing and not traif. The Orthodox insist that it does not change. We eat whatever jello is put out, and they eat only those with the Orthodox Union sign on it. The preparation of koshering meat is much different from ours, although I still stick with the Orthodox, myself, because that is the only way I learned.

F: For example, what's the difference?

M: The meat is soaked a much longer period of time. The Conservative is

sort of an instant type thing, although the butcher shop now koshers all the meat that's brought into your home.

F: You don't have to soak any more?

M: I do anyway, because it's just habit. It's traditional in my home. It has nothing to do with the Conservative belief.

F: So it merged and the greatest opposition came from the Orthodox people or from the Temple?

M: I think it came from the grandparents who belonged to the Orthodox for many years. They just couldn't see it happening.

F: But the rabbis agreed?

M: The rabbis didn't have much choice since the school is run by a principal who happens to be a member of the Temple but, I believe, probably has dual membership, Maurice Rubinoff.

F: All right, now, who is the principal?

M: Shirley Levine.

F: A woman?

M: Of course!

F: Is this Hebrew School overseen by the two rabbis?

M: They see the curriculum, that's all. They may say, "Hey, I think you ought to include this," or "I think you ought to delete this."

F: But they don't have very much to say anymore?

M: Very little to say.

F: How many teachers do you have down there now?

M: Seven.

F: Seven teachers?

M: Yes.

F: How much does it cost you to run that thing a year?

M: Probably forty, fifty thousand dollars.

F: And how many students attend now?

M: A hundred and twenty-eight this year, I believe.

F: And you have seven teachers?

M: Yes.

F: And your principal is a woman.

M: She is a school teacher.

F: Oh, she is a volunteer principal?

M: No, she is paid. She retired from the school system two years ago.

F: And the seven teachers are men?

M: There are two men; I believe the rest of them are women.

F: And they are thoroughly trained in the Talmud, or what?

M: Two of them attended Stern College in New York; one of them attended Maimonides in Boston; one of them is an Israeli trained teacher, a Sabra. Three of them are Orthodox. They're very new to the school. Five have only been there for two years. Maurice Rubinoff is the only mainstay.

F: But he isn't even a mainstay anymore.

M: He teaches there; he's no longer principal. He still teaches history, I believe. He's a very fine teacher.

F: Well, how can he teach if he's not here?

M: He is here sometimes, in the afternoon, like around four o'clock.

F: Is this school alive and well, and do you predict its continuing ad infinitum?

M: We had a meeting of the Temple Board of Directors the other day because a letter came out from the Portland Community Hebrew School that said if your child did not attend 80 percent of the time, that they would not be able to receive a Saturday Bar or Bas Mitzvah. Many young mothers came out carrying banners, and what have you, saying, "Aha! Never it will happen." Not that they were objecting to their kids attending Hebrew School, but they were not about to be told that 80 percent of the time their children would be there in order to obtain that which they think is coming to them; and I partially agree with them. I don't like to be told anything either, but I do want my child to be educated.

F: So the decision reached was . . .

M: It was thirteen to three against the 80 percent, but those voting against said they would probably send their kids 80 percent of the time, anyway. They just didn't want to be told that. They would do about what they wanted. Their kids would attend Hebrew School.

F: For what ages is Hebrew School?

M: Eight to thirteen. They have a Sunday school, I think, for the seven year olds.

F: So, it's alive and well?

M: It's alive and well and each child has six hours a week of Hebrew School. They have a Saturday morning regular service for the Hebrew School kids where they are taught folklore and Israeli dancing and they have a regular Sabbath service as well.

F: Okay, let's talk about the religious affairs committee at Temple Beth El.

M: The religious affairs committee has been run by the same men for twenty-six years, and last year I asked at a board meeting why there were no women on that board. They had no excuse, thank you very much, and so I said, "Fine, I will join you this year. Thank you." And so I joined last year and I came to the meeting and I said the time is now for women to receive aliyahs on the High Holidays. They were receiving them on the Sabbath. hey were taking them at their son's or daughter's Bar or Bat Mitzvah, but they were never asked on the High Holidays to receive an aliyah or to have some honor: opening the ark, closing the ark, what have you. And I said that the time is now and the men who were sitting there said, "No. I can see maybe letting them opening the ark this year." I said, "No, not good enough. I want to be able to touch my Torah during the High Holidays." One of the gentlemen picked up his briefcase and left and the other two sat and looked at me, and last year was the first time that six women, who have been active in the Temple, had aliyahs.

F: What is an aliyah?

M: An aliyah is an honor, one of the highest honors you can have at the Temple, certainly not at the Shul, for a woman, where you are called up to read from the Torah, to bless the Torah, or to read from the Torah. It had never been done before.

F: Are there six women in the congregation who can do that?

M: Ah, there certainly are.

?: Are you one of them

M: Yes, I am and I was.

F: And you were one of the six?

M: Yes.

F: Who were the other five?

M: Judith Elowitch and the President of the Temple, Eleanor Merdek.

F: She was the first woman president of the Temple, wasn't she?

M: Absolutely.

F: Eleanor Merdek is also secretary part time down at the Center.

M: She also sells Israeli bonds. She's the bond person.

F: Okay, Eleanor Merdek and . . .

M: Let's see now. It's hard to remember who they are. It's just so exciting. [pause] I don't recall who they are. I was in the choir loft. All I know is I told them they must choose.

F: There are certain things that will not be allowed to be erased from this transcript, [M: I'm sorry, I'm sorry about that] and this little stumbling around on the other great honorees is going to remain. [M: I'm even stammering, too]

M: They were very fine Jewish women and they did a marvelous job.

F: You just can't remember who they were [M: I can't remember who they are], who received the first of these honors in the history of Portland?

M: The fact that a woman has done this was so exciting to me. As I said, I was in the choir loft singing [F: and completely went into a spasm and could not . . .] No. [F: . . . remember who they were?] No.

F: Okay. What differences now exist between what men and women can do in the Temple?

M: Nothing.

F: Nothing?

M: Nothing.

F: Not one single thing?

M: I don't believe a woman has attended a bris, but I am not sure.

F: What is it?

M: A circumcision.

F: Don't women go to that?

M: They don't go into the room where the circumcision is performed.

F: You mean the mothers can never watch?

M: I don't think I would really care to partake. It is not one of the things I have fought for yet.

F: What did you call it?

M: A bris.

F: This is totally Ashkenazan here, isn't it, by the way?

M: The Temple has turned completely Sephardic this year. We've been taught every Friday night, since August, that we will no longer say Shabbas; it is Shabbat.

F: Well, then [M: . . . and Sukkoth and Shavuoth] when you have brit milah [M: yes], is that correct? [M: It's a bris!] Do you know happens in one here?

M: Yes.

F: Do you know how it's done here?

M: Yes.

F: Do people light circumcision candles in Portland?

M: No.

F: Do they have a watch-night in Portland?

M: No. I can only speak for the Conservative movement.

F: All right. Do they call the chair, the Chair of Eliyah, in the ceremony?

M: I don't know.

F: What happens to the foreskin?

M: I don't think it is kept like tresses of hair. I don't know.

F: Is it buried or isn't it?

M: I don't know; I never attended one of these; I've never been that curious.

F: Well, the men won't talk to me about this and now you won't talk to me about it.

M: I can't talk to you about it. It's not that I won't. I am not withholding anything . . .

F: Do they have a naming ceremony?

M: Yes.

F: You do have that in the Temple?

M: Yes, we do.

F: You hold to the principle of not naming the children after living relatives?

M: Yes.

F: You do!

M: Yes.

F: Then it is not Ashkenazan. [pause] I'm trying to pin this. I'm sorry I'm a little short about this, but everybody acts, when they say Orthodox or Ashkenazan or Sephardic or all this, as though it is obvious. And it's not. I'm just trying to figure out what each person means; and it is entirely different from what everybody else means.

M: There is halachah, which is law, and there is tradition; and some Temples maintain tradition and others, obviously, maintain halachah. In the city of Portland, I believe, we do traditionally what our parents did and it is halachah. That's what I would do. But traditionally other people may change.

F: So, that's the only thing that women don't do yet, or can't do.

M: I haven't wanted to do. I haven't found anyone who has really wanted to attend that lovely ceremony. It's a covenant and I believe it's marvelous, but I just don't want to be there. I find it very strange.

F: So, if women aren't doing things, it's because they haven't gotten used to doing things yet. There's no difference in the Temple now.

M: Absolutely none now.

F: It is unusual in Conservative Temples that it's broken down that much?

M: I think our Temple in Portland has broken ground many, many times.

F: Would this congregation ever accept a woman rabbi?

M: Absolutely!

F: What makes you think so?

M: I think this congregation is accepting of all the changes in the Conservative movement and, if the proper woman came by, I am sure they would hire her.

F: Has it been controversial, all these changes?

M: To the older members, at times, it's been hard for them to accept; but they have seen their children come to the Temple with the change and so

they are accepting it themselves now. Certainly, they see that obviously, things have to change. There are still many older members of the Temple who are shocked to see a woman be called up to the Torah.

F: Have you been given a hard time about it?

M: No, people accept pretty much what I do as being right.

F: In terms of death and burial, since you are such an expert on everything, uhm . . .

M: I am a maven. An expert.

F: In the Temple, let us say that your daughter marries a non-Jew and he doesn't convert; and your daughter dies and she's buried out in the cemetery here, right? [M: yes] Well, what do you call it? You call it a cemetery, don't you?

M: Yes, Temple Beth El Memorial Park.

F: All right, now, and then the husband dies; where will he be buried?

M: Wherever he wants, except in Temple Beth El Memorial Park.

F: Do you think that will ever change?

M: I hope not.

F: May I ask a question? If there were a child of that marriage, would the child be considered Jewish?

M: Yes, because her mother is Jewish.

F: A Jew is somebody who is the child of a Jewish woman.

M: Yes.

F: When you buried your parents, did you do it in an Orthodox manner?

M: Both parents were buried from Jones and Rich funeral parlor.

F: Which is not Orthodox.

M: Which is not Orthodox. But their bodies were attended by a Jew because we chose that.

F: Chevra Kadishah didn't do it?

M: Certainly not.

F: Why not?

M: Well, number one, my father was a founder of the Temple Beth El Memorial Park. He found the land and he set up the whole thing and that's why we went along with the whole thing.

F: When your parents died, and you were mourning, did you rip anything?

M: Yes.

F: What did you rip?

M: Uh, whatever I wore that day at the funeral.

F: Is that still the norm today?

M: No.

F: That's not usually done anymore [M: no] at the Temple? Is it done in the Shul?

M: Yes.

F: Now in terms of death, what do you believe? I know you're Jewish [laughter] but that doesn't mean anything to me. What do you believe happens to the soul?

M: I cannot accept many of the things that are said to happen. Of course, not having died, I don't really know; I would like to think that it lives forever in other people. I don't believe in a life after death but I believe one's life on earth is carried on by other people.

F: The soul lives on?

M: I felt each time that a parent died, that he or she left me what they had.

F: Do you believe that the dead continue to communicate with the living?

M: No, with the exception that I think when there are major decisions I make, I certainly try to think back to what my parents have done; and for that reason I guess it's a hazy answer. They left me a very interesting legacy, and I guess it controls much of my life now.

F: Do you think that most Jewish people in this community, in the Temple, believe with you about what happens to the soul?

M: Probably.

F: Do most women here say kaddish?

M: I think so, yes. I think it is one of the traditions which is carried on by the majority. I don't think they go every morning; but I certainly know that they are there every Friday night. They are there when the yiskor services, or any of the memorial services, are held. The attendance by the women is huge.

F: Now, in the Bar Mitzvah here, does anyone ever conduct the whole service? Have you ever seen it?

M: I have not seen anyone conduct the whole service. I have seen a great portion of it done. I don't think they're learned enough.

F: Did your daughter do as much of it as anyone does?

M: Yes. Yes, she did her Haftorah. She did part of her Torah and my husband did the rest of it.

F: So, no one conducts the whole service anymore.

M: I don't think they are learned enough; I don't think they're learned enough at 13 to do that. I don't think they've studied enough.

F: We have no families in this community producing kids with that much knowledge?

M: No, not at 13.

F: Anymore?

M: Anymore, yes.

F: Because if this was the "Jerusalem of America," they certainly had to have been doing it here at some time. [M: I'm sure they did.] Because there would have to be a reason for this place to be called that. Okay, now, let's go to Temple Beth El and the Board of Directors. You've been on it for a long time. What are the changes and the developments which you have seen at the Temple Beth El?

M: Very few women were on it.

F: Okay, but I realize that's been a major change. Are you trying to leave me with the impression that Temple Beth El is the one unique institution of Jewry in the world and the one human unique institution of all institutions in the world because it alone, unlike any other Jewish institution, and any other institution in the world, has not changed one bit since 1962? Now that is exactly the impression that everyone is trying to leave with me. I am perfectly happy to be left with it, but if it is that unique and has not changed, then I want to know why.

M: It has not changed because we are very happy with the way the ceremonies are carried out. I think the initial change in the building of the Temple from the Orthodoxy to the Conservative movement had all of the elements which were required by those people moving into the Conservative movement; and that's what makes this Temple unique. Those people are still here; they're still very happy with the services, with the tradition of the Temple; and therefore, no major change has taken place.

F: Is it a liberal Conservative Temple in its service?

M: It is traditional;I would not consider it liberal; many people do. I do not, certainly.

F: Well, the concerns expressed by the membership, religiously or traditionally or socially, in the Temple have not changed or shifted? People still worship in the same way as they did in 1962?

M: I don't think it has shifted at all. I can remember the same Friday night service in 1962 as I remember last Friday night. It hasn't changed at all. Occasionally, the Cantor will make a few musical changes but that's all. Certainly we have gone to the Sephardic as far as the language of the Temple, the Hebrew language; and that's because our kids are taught that at the Hebrew School.

F: Does the board of directors concern itself with financing the Temple?

M: Yes, it does.

F: Is it a continuing problem or is it easy?

M: They have made the proper changes and it is not running a deficit budget. It ran a deficit budget one year. There was a fund-raiser last year to straighten that out.

F: You feel very good about the Temple?

M: I love the Temple. It is part of my life.

F: Now, in terms of Federation and bond drives, how specifically do you get those bonds sold?

M: Well, number one, they are a financial investment. They're not the greatest in the world in that they are at four percent; but they do support the state of Israel and for that reason it's sort of easy to sell them.

F: Do you ever have to go out and raise money for the Federation on the drives? For example, will you help this year on Federation?

M: Certainly.

F: I'm not talking about the bond drive.

M: No, I've helped the Federation since I got here, too. I feel very strongly.

F: How have you done it? I mean how have <u>you</u> done it?

M: I have been captain of the neighborhood women's division for several years and my category, I believe, is around the hundred-dollars-plus

area. I have a personal way of doing it and the people who are on my team usually follow what I do. I don't believe in this giving until it hurts. I believe in a different approach. It's a very soft sell.

F: Do you meet your quotas?

M: Yes, we have always met our quotas. We actually go ten percent above in my particular division.

F: Now, tell me, as briefly as possible, what do you think about the Day Camp in terms of the future?

M: I think physically it cannot grow any more. This year, we had the largest number of campers ever in the camp. It remains a Jewish camp; it keeps kashruth; it's now about 75 percent Jewish; it has always taken in innercity children as part of its program. It has a 75 percent Jewish staff. The buildings are well-maintainedand it's heavily supported financially by the community, has never run a deficit, and probably never will. It's a very fine camp; and it was a great foresight on the behalf of, perhaps, Barney Shur and a few more, to have bought the land in 1946 at a small pittance. I think the value of it recently was $900,000 and I think the initial amount may have been $24,000.

F: What was Shalom House?

M: Shalom House is a half-way house.

F: A Jewish half-way house?

M: No, it's not. Its name, obviously,is Hebrew and it means "goodbye," "hello," or what have you, but it's a half-way house for either alcoholics or people who drank in mental institutions. We just felt it worthwhile.

F: If 60 percent of the Shaarey Tphiloh Sisterhood is over 60 or whatever, it must be some reflection of the congregation, of the Shul itself.

M: Well, those people who are first-generation in this country are now probably sixty-plus. Their children are remaining as members of the Shul because their parents are there. I did not remain a member because my parents were there; I remained a member because I believe that Orthodoxy must exist. I think it's the basis of the Jewish religion and I always will.

F: Okay, I'm going to get to that but I want to know something from you now.

M: Yes.

F: If you follow this, then in time the Orthodox Shul will not be a significant institution in this community, in the sense of numbers.

M: Probably not.

F: Would you say that's going to happen?

M: I don't know. The trend for the past four or five years has been that way. There has been, obviously, a decline in membership through attrition. But, I think, as I said, many of the younger members moving in from perhaps New York and New Jersey are joining the Shul because they have returned to Orthodoxy. I think in maybe ten or fifteen years it will again reach its heights of maybe ten or fifteen years ago.

F: Well, doesn't every Jewish community really have to have an Orthodox rabbi in it, somehow?

M: If the need is there, of course.

F: Well, a Conservative rabbi cannot supervise kashruth.

M: If the entire community is Conservative, he certainly can.

F: Oh, he can!

M: Oh, yes, he can!

F: Well, then an Orthodox rabbi isn't necessary.

M: No, not necessary.

F: I thought he was.

M: No.

F: All right, so you might see a decline in numbers but an increase in the fervor of those who belong?

M: Yes. I think many people have talked recently about the fact that the mihitzah will be taken down, that the congregants will sit together. I don't believe that will ever happen. I think it's just a thought, a pipe dream. I don't think they really want it. I think they belong to the Orthodox, the younger members, now because they like everything that is Orthodox, adhering to Mosaic law as their ancestors did.

F: Well, what would be the point of changing to Orthodoxy if it wouldn't be Orthodoxy? If you're going to have Orthodoxy, you want to have Orthodoxy!

M: There are lesser Orthodox synagogues across the country who do not observe everything.

F: Is this a particularly strict one?

M: It certainly is.

F: Oh, it lives up to its reputation of . . .

M: A member of the Hassidim or the Lubavitcher movement would not even attend the services of the Shaarey Tphiloh. It is not Orthodox

enough for them because the women are sitting on the same floor as the men.

F: All right, now, what do rabbis do?

M: I don't know what they do all the time.

F: Do you need a rabbi?

M: I don't need one, no.

F: Could they do without one?

M: Probably not. There are not enough learned men around to read from the Torah so they do need the rabbi. He is a teacher and he is teaching. Rabbi Sky teaches on the Sabbath and he teaches during the secondary festival holidays, during Succoth and Shevuoth; and they are very interesting times. I attend during those times. Not many people attend services at the Temple on Shevuoth, Succoth and Passover. But he teaches during those times, and he is a very excellent teacher. I don't find anyone else who can match him in teaching. So, there is a need for a learned man and a teacher but not specifically for a rabbi. A Justice of the Peace could marry someone if he wanted to.

F: Well, what do you think of the rabbinical leadership in this city since you've been around?

M: Of course, I was an admirer of Rabbi Bekritsky. He is a very fine man and a very pious man. I liked him very much. I don't know Rabbi Dworken that well. I have not taken the time to know him, certainly, so I cannot speak about him.

F: Do you think Portland has been fortunate, from your point of view, in the last forty years?

M: No, I think they've been fortunate for the past fifteen years. We've had many, many rabbis at the Temple; and they stayed a very short period of time.

F: Nobody can remember their names; nobody even remembers what they looked like and we're not talking about thirty years ago.

M: I have no idea what they looked like. They wore black robes and they all looked alike to me and they did not, obviously, make an impression on anyone in this city. No one has bothered to find out where they are living or if they have congregations [F: or what their names are] or their names; whether they've had families. They use it as a stepping stone, as Rabbi Dworken I believe has, and that is certainly his privilege, to go on to a bigger congregation, perhaps, or one more to his liking.

F: Does the Temple support its rabbi?

M: It sure does.

F: In times of trouble?

M: Yes, it has always rallied behind its rabbi. When things have been down, we have certainly come to his support. It is the old timers, basically, who do this, and I consider myself an old timer.

F: So do I.

M: Thank you!

F: Okay, moving on to the pithy part. Are there any organizations that we should have asked you about, any developments? I know this isn't terribly interesting to you. Is there anything in the area of the superficial, which is really what we have been dealing with, that I have not asked you or we should have considered?

M: I think most of the things that happen within these institutions have basically revolved around 16 or 17 people who meet in their parlors and decide what will be - not as in the Book of Life - but what will be in this community.

F: Well, finally someone is going to say that! Do you say that in criticism?

M: No, I say that's the only way it can be done. These people truly care; they are totally dedicated and they are extremely objective.

F: Give me the names of five, knowing that you are not being inclusive. Just five of the seventeen.

M: If the Temple were in trouble and I were to call a meeting, I would call Yudy Elowitch and Abe Elowitch and Maurice Elowitch and Bud Kane and Julius Greenstein and Sidney Davidson and George Lewis and his sons, Bernie and David. I would call Jerry Goldberg, and I'd say probably a few more. I would call Harry Turitz. I would call his son, David Turitz. I would call Judge Louis Bernstein. I would call Mrs. Hazel Bernstein. I would call Sidney Wernick and Charlotte Wernick. I would call Clarice Shur and Barney Shur. And those decisions would be made and something would come forth out of those meetings, and that would include any institution exclusive, certainly, of Shaarey Tphiloh. They, I am sure, have their own people.

F: Would you call the Nelsons?

M: Yes. I would call both Harold and his wife, and his son, Leonard, and Merle. I would call Ida Fineberg. These people have always come forth, either financially or with their wisdom, to make things happen at that Temple. And they have never said no. And I believe they would drop everything to do something for these institutions.

F: Well, I'm glad that we hit it this way because you are calling together, then, a group of people who, if you asked what it meant to be Jewish, every single one of those people would answer in a different way. In a significantly different way.

M: And, of course, the conscience of the Jewish community, Peggy Bernstein, would be included.

F: Oh, she's the conscience!

M: I believe so. I believe that when we are going astray, Peggy will stand up and point it out and she's usually right.

F: Give me an example.

M: Well, we brought in a young family from Israel to act as shaliach in the city of Portland, and through confusion, mismanagement or what have you, when things were not happening properly; and we were, I think, totally ready to just drop the whole situation and send the family back to Israel. I received a phone call this summer at the Day Camp. I think she must have made ten phone calls to find out where I was and told me that this should not happen and it has not happened. It meant me making several phone calls, and of course, she was right. The conversation was no more than three minutes, and she said, "Do it," and I did it. And she has done this before; she has done it with Sisterhood when she felt we were not properly doing things as Jewish people. She's called me and I have always responded to her. And she calls many other people, I am sure. She is extremely objective.

F: Again, you would be calling together in the group you just named 17 Jews who would find themselves very, very different, individually, in terms of their Jewishness. Now, what is it that joins them all together?

M: Obviously, . . .

F: No, it's not obvious.

M: All right, I think it's obvious. I think the fact that we're all Jewish and all totally dedicated to the institutions, I believe that's true.

F: Well, all being Jewish isn't saying anything.

M: Well, I think they are all traditionalists in their own way. They don't all practice the religion the same way, but I think that it's the type of thing that we are all brethren and I truly believe that. I am not the least bit intimidated in any way to walk into a Jewish house and say, "I need. I am Jewish." And I believe I would receive in those houses. Those doors are always open.

F: Well, you would maintain there's a mystical thing?

M: Oh, absolutely.

F: Now, a lot of Jewish leaders would not maintain that, but would maintain the opposite, would say that mysticism is found in Christianity. No one can tell me what ties it together with any firmness. You would say it is

mystical?

M: Yes.

F: It's more than religious? Is that [M: has to be more than religious] fair to say?

M: Yes, because we are all at different levels in our religion, in our adherence to our religion.

F: Judaism is not a religion, then?

M: No, it's a way of life. It has to be. Can't be a religion. We've all had the same God for 5,737 years, but we've all worshipped Him and tried to emulate Him in different ways, different manners, many of which certainly are not acceptable to the code of Mosaic law.

F: Do you believe you are chosen?

M: Yes.

F: To do what, for what?

M: If you talk to me personally, uhm, . . .

F: I'm asking you personally.

M: Okay, why am I chosen? Again I have to go back to 1962. I walked into the Temple one day, I can't even remember the reason why; but as I walked by the sanctuary, I actually felt drawn into the sanctuary, which I had never felt before. I went up on the bimah and I opened up the ark, which I had never done before; and I just sat there for about an hour. I think, really, from that time on I felt inspired and I can't even tell you by what except that it was the first time I had ever touched the Torah.

F: In 1962 you became involved in the Jewish community? I think it is fair to say that there was a change [M: oh, yes] in your life. You maintain that you were Orthodox and that there never was a break. But I think it is fair to challenge that, and to say that there was a significant difference, at least in the way you exercised your Judaism, from about 1962. I was going to ask you how that came about; have you just already told me?

M: I think it's almost a touching, a laying on of hands, if that's perhaps the thing. Something I - I even felt. I felt a physical change, a warmth, that I have felt since that time; but it was certainly significant the first time it happened; and I think from that time on, I have grown absolutely fearless.

F: From a non-organizational person, you became an organizational person. Why do you do this?

M: It is a need.

F: Does it help you?

M: It helps me personally, yes. I am inspired by everything I do. Since I have received this initial inspiration, I feel as though I must earn each day that I am here by performing mitzvot, good deeds. And they are not all those that are listed that I must perform. There are things which merely come to me and I am actually very pleased when they do.

F: What's the longest space of time you can remember in the last two weeks [pause] when you were awake [pause] that you were not consciously thinking about being Jewish?

M: I don't think that could happen.

F: Not for a moment?

M: Not for hardly a moment.

F: Do you think that will continue?

M: I think I have passed several severe tests, and I'm still here to serve God if I can. So, I don't think I could ever change. I think I have been tried as much as anyone can be tried and I am still here to perform the very . . .

F: I would be careful. God says in the Old Testament that if you believe you have been tried about as much as anybody has been tried, watch out, because then you are really going to get it.

M: Well, you call it Murphy's Law; I call it Bernstein's Law.

F: Well, I am just telling you I know the Old Testament as well as you do.

M: Probably better.

F: And I can tell you that if you say that, God also says that you're <u>really</u> going to get it.

M: But for the same reason that He tests you, He also gives you the strength to survive these tests and I believe He does that with me, too. Otherwise I would not be here.

F: Well, where was He when the six million Ashkenazan Jews were being killed?

M: Testing.

F: Testing what? What was the test?

M: Testing the survivors, for the same reason that Moses was not allowed to go into Israel, to Palestine at the time, and had to wander the desert for forty years. I believe that we were not wandering at the time of the Holocaust; we were straying, certainly.

F: Well, then, why did he punish the least straying and leave the most straying untouched?

M: If I have gotten anything out of the Holocaust at all, it has made me aware that I, certainly, have strayed; and that He does test in His infinite wisdom in many many horrible, horrible ways; but if we didn't get a lesson out of the Holocaust, then it was for nothing. And I think many people got a lot out of the Holocaust. Listen, six million Jews died, X-amount of Jews lived; and I think they were all tested by their brethren dying because these were not strangers to me; these were my brothers. In every face I see, I see people I know. I guess I live differently because of the way they died, too. I think it is very significant that it happened; but six million died there, and at Masada nine hundred died, and other places, pogroms, people died, and they were all tests.

F: Well, how many American Jews are there?

M: Probably around fourteen million.

F: American Jews?

M: Yes. Five million in New York.

F: So God, in His inimitable wisdom, then, eliminated six million so that fourteen wouldn't stray as much?

M: Well, there are fourteen million Jews in America who certainly . . .

F: Well, aren't American Jews the most straying Jews?

M: Yes.

F: Not the Eastern European Jews?

M: True.

F: Not the ones who died?

M: It depends. I think those who have not been involved directly with the Holocaust but who know about it, who read about it, still have to be involved in it because it happened; and they have changed their way of emulating God. I think they are now turning to the treatment of man, their brother, instead of just trying to emulate God. I think they are now becoming, as we call them, Menchlicheit. They now look at their brothers as being more important, or equal to, serving God. I think that's the change and I think it's a magnificent change. I think words are fine; I think praying is magnificent; but I think deeds are the only answer. And I think the Jews now perform more good deeds for their fellowmen than they ever have before. I think that's the change that has taken place.

F: Do you think we should forget the Holocaust now?

M: No.

F: Or do you think we should try even harder to educate, first of all, Jewish youth, and second of all, non-Jewish youth? I'm not asking for an obvious answer. There is certainly disagreement among the Jewish community.

M: I don't see how anybody could ignore the Holocaust and not continue to teach it. I think it was obviously one of the most significant tragedies of mankind and how can anyone easily forget that, or why would they want to? It is a living lesson today.

F: Because, as some of the Jewish leaders say, it is a sacrilege to even speak of it.

M: I think it is very tough to think about the Holocaust. Once when I was around 13 years old, Judge William Berman, who was a neighbor of mine, showed me pictures. He was a judge at Nuremburg. He showed me pictures that he had had at the trial and I was terrified of being Jewish because of what had happened. And he sat down with me a year later and said, "Don't be terrified. Just learn your lesson from it."

F: Except that he never slept a night since then, no more than three hours a night from the day that he performed his services as an advocate lawyer at the Dora Nordhausen trials. He could not live with his own philosophy.

M: He was a very different kind of a man; he was an intellectual Jew without any practice of the religion at all; and his daughter, Esther Clenott, is a friend of mine - she's also a very brilliant, brilliant woman. [F: Clenott?] Yes. Esther Clenott was Judge Berman's daughter, and she's also the same way. She is a very bright, very intellectual, very esthetic woman, but she, in her own way, does her own thing, too; so I think the effect went beyond the Judge himself.

F: Why do you think it is important that Israel remain as a state?

M: I think it is a pride type of thing for me. Anytime anything happens in Israel, it's a very strange feeling. I think the last event in Africa was an amazing feat and I think Jews do very amazing things. Their numbers are small and I think they have help, obviously, and I think at times the help is necessary. I could not be as proud a Jew without the State of Israel as I am. I think it is a magnificent place. I have not visited it. My husband has been there; and each time he comes back, his life changes a bit and it's better. It is not a religious state; it is a way of life again, but we finally have our own country and it is ours and I am very proud of it. And I think it has a tremendous effect on American Jewry. It has a tremendous effect on the world.

F: Was your initial Yiddish culture important to you?

M: Yes.

F: Why?

M: Because it did the things that I talk about now, man's relation to man. My mother always stressed, as my father did, that yiddishkeit in your home is asking people in to eat who have less than you do and sharing the things you have. As my father said, "You can eat just so many loaves of bread and drive just so many cars at the same time." Yiddishkeit has taught me to share, to think of my brethren before myself. The Torah, of course, stresses that, anyway; but I think that upbringing has made me a better person, certainly. It is very easy to be selfish, but it is a lot easier to share what you have, to put other people before you. It's a very good feeling. I can't exist without it. I never remember a time on a holiday when we had less than 25 people for dinner, and they weren't the elite of the city of Portland. They were people in need. And they were very fine people and my mother did some really magnificent things before me. She's left me that legacy and I'm very pleased with that.

F: Do you worry about assimilation and intermarriage and the reduction or destruction of American Jewry?

M: No. I believe that those who survive the assimilation, and those who survive intermarriage will be the strongest again: the center, the basis of the Jewish religion. And I'm not worried too much about assimilation. I would very much like my daughter to marry someone of my own faith, but if she doesn't, it's not going to change my life any, and I hope it doesn't change hers.

F: Have you ever experienced any discrimination?

M: Yes. Certainly, in first and second grade, I was called names. Fortunately, at the time, I didn't know what they meant because I spoke no English; but my sisters told me. Kids used to taunt and tease and physically throw rocks and all that kind of thing, and call me interesting names at that time. This was, I think, one of the reasons why we moved from Munjoy Hill to Woodfords area.

F: What kind of names did they call you?

M: Kike, Christ killer; Goddam Jew is one of the milder things I've been called; but, as my father would say, "One out of two isn't bad." And, of course, in high school, I was excluded from clubs, which I really didn't care to join. The only thing I joined in high school were those connected with athletics, although I served on the Student Council. But there were clubs which I could not join. One of my friends came to me at one time, I think during my sophomore year, and said, "I'd very much like to have you in this club, but of course, you're Jewish." And I said, "Yes, I am, and I thank you," and it did not change our re-

lationship one bit. She knew I was Jewish and I knew I was Jewish and I have never really wanted to go into a place that did not want Jewish people; and I would not be a token member of anything. The only thing I would ever do, I guess, is make room in my own religion for women to take over certain things; but in the non-Jewish world where I am not wanted, I certainly don't want to be. I have played golf at the Portland Country Club wearing the largest mezuzah you ever saw and would not eat there when I was served food because I told them it was unclean because it wasn't kosher; and I carried on so badly that I'm sure they wouldn't want me, anyway.

F: You have experienced discrimination as an adult?

M: Yes.

F: Where, tell me.

M: I was an avid golfer when I was in Boston and there were country clubs where the members were not aware that Jews were not invited. I was invited as a guest and was told upon entering that I could have lunch there but I could not play golf there; and I told them that since I could not eat their luncheon, obviously, I could not stay.

F: What about in Portland?

M: Yes, I have experienced discrimination here, too, mostly on a very personal basis. I had a problem with one gentleman who lives on my street. I think it was the first year that Chuck and I moved there. He came up to me and said, "Your dog was on my lawn this morning and I just wanted to let you know it's not because you're Jewish that I object to your dog being on my lawn." And I tried to tie the two together and had a very difficult time; and I told him that since my dog was on his lawn, anytime he wanted to come and pee on my lawn [laughter], he was welcome even though he was not a Jew; and we have parted since. We now wave. Have a very marvelous relationship.

F: But, other than that?

M: Other than that, my association with the non-Jewish world is so limited. I'm not looking for it and I'm not finding it.

F: You have a <u>very</u> limited association with the non-Jewish world, don't you?

M: The only non-Jewish people that I am associated with are such very fine people that I almost consider them one of us. Almost!

F: And they are all at this table?

M: They are all at this table and I am very pleased to have them all here.

F: Well, that's it?

M: It is, when you stop and think about it.

F: My sister says whenever she stops to think about it, that the one horror in her life is that everyone in the East is going to meet only one Montanan, and that's going to be me. [laughter in background] She says she could commit suicide if she focused on it too long. Because an example, or representative of anything, I am not, she says. You would like her. She is a truly honest person. She is 20 times more honest than I am. [M: I doubt that!] No, 20 times more, 20 times more forthright, honest, et cetera. She makes no compromises; she doesn't shade anything; just straight on. I think it's strange, in your age group with your activity, that you would make the statement that you just did. I don't think that is so usual any more, is it?

M: No.

F: Even with the people you list, the people who you would gather in that Temple, hardly any of them could say that, except if you are talking about age, Rebecca Bernstein, but I even doubt that. Hardly anyone else fits. You must have some reason for that. Why is it?

M: Perhaps even in sitting down at a meal with a non-Jew, I guess I have prejudices, too, obviously.

F: And their table manners are so bad that you can't stand it!

M: And the table manners are so bad they . . . No, I find that some of the things I say are very inside, very ethnic type of things to say, and I would not want to offend other people by saying them. I find that when I am gathered in a group of Jewish people, I say pretty much what is on my mind; and the ethnic humor is there and I find that gentiles do not respond to this. My life revolves around God in his humor and my own humor, and I find people are offended by it. I don't particularly care to offend people; and therefore, I try to stay away from that.

F: You try to stay away from gentiles, don't you?

M: I guard my talk very carefully with the exception of the people in this room, I think.

F: You try to stay away from gentiles, right? [M: Sure do.] If you can?

M: I sure do!

F: Why? It is not because of ethnic humor. What is the reason? What do you think it is? You may not even know. What do you think is at the basis? You don't trust the gentile world, do you?

M: No, not really.

F: If other Jews were more honest with themselves, do you think they would admit the same?

M: Probably.

F: Do you think there's much change in the last 50 years? What's at the heart of it?

M: I hope so. I know there has been a change and I know, certainly, that I could probably go out, but I will not.

F: I am not talking about form, or being, or people being more cautious about what they say. I am not talking about form. What essentially changes the Cumberland Club because there are three Jewish members?

M: Laws, liquor laws.

F: No, but what essentially changes it? What do they have to worry about?

M: I don't think anything has changed for the Cumberland Club, but I think they have to guard their conversation as much as I would guard mine. I am very uncomfortable around that situation.

F: What I am saying is this: Just because Jewish people are part of some of these organizations now, what has actually changed? I am not so certain that means that people have changed any.

M: No, nothing will change. I don't think anything will change these people. For whatever reasons, their dislike [F: It certainly has been one of the longest held] of the Jewish people will never change.

F: Tradition, isn't it?

M: Passed through generations. I have found this in kids I grew up with and went to school with. "Are you still Jewish?" "Yes." You know, really!

F: Now, I have only about three more questions. How do you react to the Howe definition of the Temple as a "secularized community center, a low-pressured, undemanding religiosity that stresses good works, liberal ethics, Jewish responsibility with a minimal identification?"

M: I disagree only with the last statement. I agree with everything else.

F: You think it is an undemanding religiosity?

M: Absolutely . . . absolutely.

F: You think that it is undemanding?

M: Yes.

F: Of course, if you think about it, it is less demanding than Christianity in the way that most people practice it.

M: True.

F: High Holidays . . . actually there is less attendance in long boring religious ceremonies, but a long . . .

M: The longest and most boring, of course, is Rosh Hashanah because it is repetitious. The same service that is held on this coming Sabbath will be held on Sunday; it is exactly the same one; it is no longer done this way in Israel because it is repetitive. I personally could not sit through two days of it and haven't for many years. Since I am a member of the choir, I can sort of leave when I want to. I am still a practicing Jewess; I don't see all of this being necessary; and I don't pray well at all. Can hardly pronounce the words, have no need.

F: All right, Cynthia, by any criteria, you have been describing a very Orthodox Jewish woman. Are you in the Temple because it has a better attitude toward women? Is that the reason? You really are a very Orthodox woman. Let me ask you one preceding question; do you know of anyone else in Portland who lives in the two worlds so thoroughly and so easily?

M: No.

F: Well, I don't know of anyone either. I would like to talk to another one if you have anyone to recommend but I don't know who you would name. So, you are peculiar, you're an odd-ball. Now, when you describe yourself and everything you say as an Orthodox Jewish woman, why are you in the Temple?

M: I don't know. As I say, there is an indescribably warm feeling when I am in the Temple even if I am just visiting the Temple. I very seldom walk into the Temple without walking into the sanctuary, just for a minute, just opening the door to be sure that my Torah is still there.

F: Yours?

M: Oh, it is mine. It is mine. And if the light is properly shining on the Ten Commandments, then I am very happy and I just go about my business. There is an exception. There is a Lubavitcher Shul in Boston where I had the very same feeling ten or fifteen years ago of walking in and feeling that I was home. And I don't feel that in the Orthodox. I carry on so badly when I attend an Orthodox service that I am sure they are very pleased that I don't go there anymore. I do attend the service on Succoth at the Orthodox because I like the way they have the service there. It's a little different from the Temple. It's what I remember as a youngster and I like it; although, as I say, Chuck and I do still build our sukkah and we still have a service in there every single day and night. And we eat in it and we have other people to eat in it. I like to go there. I like to watch it. I don't participate in it because I am a woman but secretly, underneath, I am saying all of the things that they are saying. They can't exclude me.

F: Do you think if you were a young twelve-year-old now, that you would want to be a rabbi?

M: No! [laughter in background]

F: No?

M: No.

F: Boy, you are as close to being a rabbi as anyone I know who isn't a rabbi and maybe more than some of them are who are rabbis. Why would you react so strongly?

M: I like the relationship I have with God. It's a very personal and very singular one and I can't share it with anyone else. I find it hard to describe to other people. I don't think I could possibly do that as a rabbi. I think many people share the feelings I have but just can't express them.

PA: I don't know whether this is anything you can answer or not, actually, Cynthia, but you touched on it lightly. You didn't know why many non-Jews didn't like Jews. I mean, you must have some feelings as to why?

M: I can't rationalize it; not as a Jew, I can't.

PA: In other words, you can't understand it?

M: No.

PA: You don't know what is at the basis of it?

M: Let me say very quickly that I admired Jesus Christ; I do today. I admire those people who are trying to emulate his life and I don't understand why Christians have this feeling towards Jews and so I certainly don't . . .

F: Well, Christians don't. No one who has that feeling is a Christian, because Christ did not have that feeling.

M: You have absolutely hit on it. You absolutely hit on it, Konnie, that is absolutely it.

F: Christ brought in the prostitutes. I mean, he didn't have a hang-up about Jews. He had no hang-ups about any human beings on this earth. I am not talking about Him as the Son of God or even as a mortal prophet. A person who hates any group or discriminates in any way is certainly not a Christian by any standard to be applied.

M: I agree with that. I guess that is why I don't understand it.

F: So, we're not really talking about Christians?

M: No.

F: You cannot be a Christian and [M: I agree with that] feel that way about any group of people. You cannot. That is why

the Pope isn't a Christian and why many Catholic priests are not Christians. They are not Christians. They cannot be by any reading of the New Testament, by any reading, any version, any language, any interpretation. They can discriminate against women. They can do that by some readings of the New Testament. Okay. I think those came when the men wrote when they weren't inspired. They can pull that off by some readings of the New Testament. But there is no way they can pull off discrimination by using the New Testament by any of the new versions, old versions or anything else.

M: I agree.

F: Well, I think God is a man.

M: No question about it!

F: Not a woman, and He didn't really understand certain things. Did that answer your question?

M: I think God's only problem is that He didn't have a mother.

PA: Well, it is something that I think we all struggle with and try to understand. I just thought maybe she might have some different ideas on it. I know that it is something we all fight within our own heads, trying to understand it ourselves, and I am sure you have done it.

F: I doubt that you even give much thought to it. You don't give much energy to thinking about the non-Jews, do you?

M: No. They make up nine-tenths of the earth and I do at times have to be involved with them and occasionally do agree with them. But I certainly would not want them to be in judgement of me, nor can they be, so I don't have to worry about them. But I know they exist and they make me more Jewish every single time I come in contact with many of them. It's been very interesting. My daughter has been attending Catholic Mass with friends of hers for the past seven or eight weeks. Each time she comes back, she says, "Mom, Jesus Christ must have been a very magnificent person." So she is feeling that now, too, but she says, "But I don't understand some of his followers." And that is very wise. And my daughter, unlike myself, has no Jewish friends. They are all Catholic; there are five of them and they are all Catholic, and they get along famously, and many of them are at our house on the eve of the Sabbath; and they are in our sukkah when we eat, and it is a very good relationship. I am very pleased she has that. I hope it will never change. So, maybe the world is changing a bit. At least in our own little corner it is.

F: But for you it will not change?

M: It will never change, no.